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China's Footprint in Strategic Spaces of the European Union

New Challenges for a Multi-dimensional EU-China Strategy

Johann Frank and Doris Vogl (eds.)

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Introduction

Johann Frank, Doris Vogl

Objectives

A more holistic view is required for the analysis of China's footprint in eurostrategic spaces. The current volume takes up this challenge as main objective with a focus on balanced analysis. Besides analysing the encounter between the European Union and the People's Republic of China in the geostrategic arena, the authors of this volume also examine strategic areas like digital space, Low Earth Orbit space and Outer Space. This multi-faceted approach is based on a comprehensive security concept combining military hard power factors with economic, socio-cultural and financial ones. Accordingly, the contributions are dealing with various spheres of influence, signalling China's advance in strategic spaces of the European Union. A separate annex provides a situational inventory of the PLA's military capabilities and is supposed to complete the overall picture.

In 2019, the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) published the volume *"Chinas Grand Strategy im Wandel"* (Eng.: China's Grand Strategy in Transition), which remains limited to a German-speaking readership and is thematically focused on the assumption of a grand strategy with emphasis on policy changes of the last two decades. The present volume **"China's Footprint in Strategic Spaces of the European Union"** mainly takes stock of the present-day situation and also poses questions regarding the future.

The Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management draws on extensive experience as academic advisory body in the realm of Austrian security policy. The institute's researching staff is supposed to adhere to the rules of balanced analysis. Against this background, the conclusions in the various contributions of this volume are based on individual assessments of the authors. The editors do not take responsibility for the authors' divergent points of view.

Last but not least, the commitment and mission of the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management are geared towards reducing avoidable confrontation and tension, in the original sense of peace support and conflict management.

Special features

Two special features distinguish this publication: First, the holistic approach by considering several non-traditional strategic spaces like digital currencies or the LEO space. Second, the presentation of some Chinese strategic narratives shaping and dominating the current People's Republic foreign policy.

The discussion of Chinese narratives – presented in the first part of the present volume – refers to the definition of strategic narratives according to Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2014):

> Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics, and to shape the perceptions, beliefs and behaviour of domestic and international actors. Specifically, by tracing the formation, project and reception of strategic narratives, we can explain how states seek to shape the international order, pursue policy outcomes, and enhance policy and political legitimacy.[1]

The exploration of current Chinese narratives is well-suited to serve the objective of improving the level of European knowledge and understanding when interacting with Beijing in various spaces. Strategic narratives are also future-oriented[2] and hence constitute valuable indicators for risk analysis and the development of competing or partnering strategies. At the same time,

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[1] A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle (2014), *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1; for additional defining details, see also: "Conceptually, narratives offer a particular structure through which shared sense is achieved, representing a past, present and future, an obstacle and a desired end point. States use narratives strategically, though they face various constraints in their capacities to do so." Ibid., 2, https://www.academia.edu/2783582/Forging_the_World_Strategic_Narratives_and_International_Relations.

[2] Ibid., 4, "A strategic narrative may refer to the past and/or present, but as a strategic device its utility is connected to shaping politics in the future."

narratives may provide a sort of navigation frame in regard to the predictability of political actions of "the other party."

The second part of the publication is dedicated to the geographical space and examines China's presence in selected countries and regions. Six researchers provide analysis in regard to China's footprint in selected countries and regions, covering a wide geographical range from Serbia to Afghanistan.

The third part of this volume puts the European Union in the foreground. EU-China relations are screened for their limiting factors as well as for options of cooperation. When looking at Brussels' regional strategic ambitions as declared in the EU Global Strategy, the distinction is made between a "broader" and a "narrow" orbit of the European Union. In the final summary, some major messages are listed, which result from the individual contributions.

China in EU strategy documents

Not only has China's economic presence in strategic spaces of the EU seen remarkable momentum over the past few years, China's performance in the international arena has also changed. The new assertiveness of the political elites – civilian and military – of the People's Republic is much discussed. Why was the previous foreign policy paradigm "to keep a low profile" of those years before the Xi Jinping era replaced by the appearance of a resolute and offensive great power attitude? The answer is simple and has little to do with the person or leadership style of Xi Jinping: The strategy of keeping a low profile has become obsolete. Quite on the contrary, it would lack a certain rationality if China's recent metamorphosis into a global power were accompanied by a static political performance strategy. Meanwhile, the macro-economic parameters of the People's Republic allow a new performance style. Often enough massive international critique and sanctions are pre-calculated by Beijing as collateral damage that can be absorbed.

How did and does Brussels cope with China as a new competitive major power? What are the contours of the European strategic response to this challenge? In order to examine these questions on an introductory note, it seems appropriate to chronicle the development of the current China

strategy of the European Union. As starting point serves the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda, a bilateral comprehensive agreement, signed in 2013. At that time, the Belt & Road Initiative had just started, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was not yet founded, and the Xi Jinping era was at its very beginning. The agreed bilateral cooperation was built on two basic commitments: The PR China reaffirmed its support for EU integration, vice versa the European Union did not object to global trends towards "multipolarity."[3] Further, bilateral regular dialogue meetings (annual High-Level Strategic Dialogue, annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue, several sectoral dialogues) and a general upgrade in practical cooperation were agreed. Overall, it can be said that the agenda gives the strong impression of "fair weather" diplomacy. However, the EU-China Agenda for Cooperation, signed bilaterally in 2013, also proved to meet the challenges of an "all-weather" cooperation agreement.

It goes without saying that the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) is the crucial European strategy document of the last decade. However, China is barely mentioned in the EUGS of June 28, 2016. In the section "A Connected Asia," the relationship with China is only fleetingly addressed in a short text passage.[4] This may be due to the fact that almost at the same time, on June 22, 2016, a separate China strategy was adopted by the High

[3] Point I – "Peace and Security" - of the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* reads as follows: "The world's trends towards multipolarity and economic globalization are deepening. […] As important actors in a multipolar world, the EU and China commit to enhancing dialogue and coordination at bilateral, regional and global levels, to meet regional and global challenges together, and work to make the international order and system more just and equitable." EEAS 2013, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/eu-china_2020_strategic_agenda_en.pdf.

[4] European Union, "A Connected Asia," *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, 37, "The EU will engage China based on respect for rule of law, both domestically and internationally. We will pursue a coherent approach to China's connectivity drives westwards by maximizing the potential of the EU-China Connectivity Platform, and the ASEM and EU-ASEAN frameworks. The EU will also deepen trade and investment with China, seeking a level playing field, appropriate intellectual property rights protection, greater cooperation on high-end technology, and dialogue on economic reform, human rights and climate action." https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission in a Joint Communication, entitled "Elements for a new EU strategy on China." In the EU Strategy on China of June 2016, Brussels is already adopting a more demanding tone by stressing the elements of reciprocal benefit, fair competition and normative principles of EU engagement.[5] The additional proposal to push for the timely completion of negotiations as well as for the opening-up of new markets mirrors the dissatisfaction Brussels was experiencing at that time.[6]

The perceived deficits on the European side in regard to reciprocity and progress in negotiations caused a rethink in Brussels, triggering a comprehensive re-orientation towards Beijing (*EU-China – A strategic Outlook*, March 12, 2019)[7]. The document was published as an update, but in practical terms, this update marks a strategic milestone. The declaration that the China strategy of 2016 is still valid does by no means diminish the importance of the cesura:

> The 2016 Strategy on China remains the cornerstone of EU engagement, providing the basis for delivering a further EU policy shift towards a more realistic, assertive, and multi-faceted approach. This will ensure that relations with this strategic partner are set on a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial course.[8]

The "multi-faceted approach" – as cited above – crystallized in March 2019 to the effect that a clear-cut differentiation is made between cooperation, competition and rivalry. For each of the three relationship settings, corresponding topics for bilateral negotiation with Beijing were named in different policy areas. Against this background, questions in regard to

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[5] European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Elements for a new EU strategy on China*, June 22, 2016, 2, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/joint_communication_to_the_european_parliament_and_the_council_-_elements_for_a_new_eu_strategy_on_china.pdf.

[6] Ibid.

[7] European Commission, *Joint Communication to the EP, the European Council and the Council, EU-China, A strategic outlook*, March 12, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf.

[8] Ibid., 1.

normative rivalry, competition for new markets and options for cooperation are examined in Part III of this volume.

The rapid advance of the PR China into various geostrategic spaces is also reflected in the EU Global Strategy activity report 2019. Under the headline *Global governance and cooperative regional orders,* the urgent necessity for European unity is invoked to "reap the opportunities of cooperation while managing the challenges posed by China's rise as an economic and technological superpower and a systemic competitor."[9] Further, the EEAS report refers to the EU connectivity strategy, underlining that "great infrastructure projects should be about creating fair economic opportunities, not about geopolitics." In reference to the EU-China summit of April 2019, the envisaged identification of common EU-Asia railway corridors is addressed.[10] The Asia section of the EUGS activity report highlights diversification and deepening of diplomatic and economic cooperation with various Asian countries. In remarkably few words, the "update" of the China-Strategy in March 2019 is mentioned.[11]

More than two years have passed since March 2019 and the turbulent dynamics of the current times ask for a more precisely elaborated European strategy. To date, EU member states in collaboration with EU bodies are working on a "Strategic Compass" designed to further refine the EU Global Strategy 2016. The final document for the Strategic Compass of the European Union is supposed to be published by March 2022.

In preparation of the final Strategic Compass document, a number of workshops and conferences were held. However, when it comes to issues where one could expect the mentioning of China, the texts remain very general. For example: An event report of March 2021 – published by the EU

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[9] EEAS (2019), *The European Union's Global Strategy - Three Years on, looking forward*, 15, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_global_strategy_2019.pdf.

[10] Ibid., 48, "At the 2019 EU-China summit we agreed to identify common EU-Asia railways corridors, and we are working on local development in transit countries."

[11] Ibid., 19, "We have reached political and trade agreements with Japan, Vietnam and Singapore, we are pursuing comprehensive negotiations with several other partners, we have developed an ambitious connectivity strategy linking Europe and Asia, **we have updated our comprehensive strategic partnership with China,** and we have deepened our relationship with Central Asia."

Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) – concludes that in the domains of Outer Space and Cyberspace "challenges and risks are fuelled by the development of new tools, capabilities and strategies by the EU's main competitors."[12] The main competitors are not named.

It remains to be seen whether the forthcoming Strategic Compass refers to the EU-China Strategic Agenda of 2013 or avoids any reference to bilateral agreements with Beijing. In regard to the partnership dimension of the Strategic Compass the engagement with China is expected to remain issues-based, following the EU's interests. In this context, there is a need to give more substance to the definition of European interests.

Since the EU Strategic Compass is supposed to align politico-strategic guidance for EU security and defence, the document will have to give a clear answer as to how China's advance into strategic spaces of the European Union is perceived. A cautious attitude towards Washington's new security paradigm of "China as Threat No. 1" does not relieve Brussels of the complex task of evaluating China's presence in strategic spaces as challenge, security risk, potential threat, or in the best of all cases as opportunity.

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[12] EUISS, event report March 2021, Contested global commons: a multidimensional issue for the Strategic Compass, 1, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/FR-EUISS%20-%20Contested%20Global%20Commons%20%28Report%29.pdf.

Part I

Chinese Strategic Narratives in the Geopolitical Context

China's Strategic Narratives

Doris Vogl

Why are strategic narratives relevant in the context of security-related assessment? The answers are manifold: First of all, the study of the strategic narratives of a second party will always help to explain "how existing and emerging powers seek to impose a shared meaning of how the international order does, or should, function."[1] Secondly, thorough knowledge on meta-narratives facilitates the understanding of multiple sub-narratives, relevant to the strategic level. Thirdly, situational assessment is geared towards decision making. Considering the narratives of the other side will definitely include a substantial element in the decision-making process.

Last but not least, the strategic narratives of the other side may be tested against realities on the ground and possible identified contradictions may be put forward by the European side in ongoing bilateral negotiations. At this point it should be noted that the identification of contradictions within Chinese official discourse patterns constitutes a well-established and extensively used argumentation method. In the same vein, Brussels may always draw on the Deng Xiaoping maxim "Seek truth from facts" (shi shi qiu shi), which has not lost its discursive importance to this day.

Eclipsed strategic narratives

According to The Free Dictionary, "eclipse" is synonymous for "the partial or complete obscuring, relative to a designated observer, of one celestial body by another" (https://www.thefreedictionary.com). This is exactly the case for the overwhelming majority of western publications on the People's Republic of China: Official Chinese narratives remain in the shadow, on the "dark side of the moon." Irrespective of the thematic subject – may it be international relations in a wider sense, the Belt & Road Initiative or great power competition – the global actor China is regarded and commented through the lens of Western narratives. For years, a small minority of western

[1] Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin, "Russias Narratives of Global Order - Great Power Legacies in a Polycentric World," in *Politics and Governance* (2017/3), 113 (111-20).

researchers has been deploring the disinterest in non-Western terminology and related narratives, due to the solely Western categorization of international affairs.[2] Particularly, the professional community of sinologists has put a strong emphasis on their concerned demand to pay more attention to official Chinese narratives.[3]

A main intention of this publication is to step out of the current mainstream approach and shift the spotlight to the rather unexplored "other side". In this spirit, the first part of the book introduces and reflects a number of official narratives, as channelled and supported by the political leadership of the PR China in the sphere of international relations. In the second part of the book, the implementation aspect of the presented narratives is tested against realities on the ground. The final part is dedicated to analytical conclusions drawn from geographical case studies.

There is abundant literature and research in the thematic context of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). This publication does not place a thematic focus on the BRI but takes a closer look at the related "Health Silk Road" narrative, which was created against the backdrop of the global pandemic situation in 2020. In the second part of the book, several authors present their analyses, including observations as to which extent and in what form the Belt & Road Initiative has triggered expectations and produced concrete results within BRI participant nations. In addition, the second part examines how far Chinese strategic narratives are implemented and reflected in bilateral relations.

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[2] Emilian Kavalski, „The Guanxi of Relational International Affairs," in *Chinese Political Science Review* (2018/3), 233-51; Pinar Bilgin, *The International in Security, Security in the International*, Routledge 2017; Louiza Odysseos, *The Subject of Coexistence: Otherness in International Relations*, University of Minnesota (ed.), 2007.

[3] Thomas Heberer, "The Chinese 'Developmental State 3.0' and the resilience of authoritarianism," in *Journal of Chinese Governance* (2016/1), 611-32; Harro von Senger, *Moulüe – Supraplanung, Unerkannte Denkhorizonte aus dem Reich der Mitte*, Hanser, München 2018; Chih-yu Shih, *Harmonious Intervention: China's Quest for Relational Security*, Surrey: Ashgate 2014.

Characteristics of Chinese strategic narratives

In the world of international relations, the leading political institutions of the PR China pay considerable attention to official strategic narratives. Even though their messages are addressed to the outside world, their objectives are also of systemic relevance inside China. Establishing norms und building up a reputation abroad also entails a certain impact on domestic public opinion. All official narratives cultivate norms that present China's relations to other countries in a favourable light.

Recent years have seen a slight shift as to the main objective of official narratives. In the "New Era" – as declared by the 19th National Congress of the CPC in November 2017 - building an international reputation as a generous, kind and competent actor has become secondary to the aim of gaining a global standing as a responsible, resolved and assertive global power. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing focus on continuity to be found in Chinese IR narratives. Certain characteristics of most Chinese strategic narratives in the field of international relations are noteworthy and listed below:

Long-term Projection and Homogeneity

Even though there have always been several leading political groups in the People's Republic, only one homogeneous narrative is officially released to the world. To some extent, this salient feature of homogeneity is intended to demonstrate the unity of political leadership. This should not lead to the assumption that in the process of developing strategic narratives, critical and dissenting voices are not taken into account. The usual breeding grounds for internal criticism of the system and the narratives are the Academy of Sciences, universities or the working committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).[4]

[4] According to official statements, the CPPCC National Committee collects opinions from different social domains and acts as a consultative body for national decision making under the control of the CCP. See link: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/03/c_136098744.htm. The CPPCC has listed 536 seats for political parties, 97 of which are held by the CCP, 377 seats are reserved for the so-called "Eight Democratic Parties," and 62 seats are assigned to independent members. The remaining 1,664 CPPCC-seats are held by organisations and sectoral representatives.

Another feature of the Chinese narratives is their long-term projection and validity. Despite the declaration of a "New Era" by the 19th CPC National Congress in November 2017, the guiding narratives for international relations have not been subject to any major changes over the past years. There are still narratives in place dating back to Zhou Enlai, who served as foreign minister[5] from 1949 to 1958 during the early Maoist era: For example, the diplomatic guidelines of "mutual respect" between opposing political systems or "abstention from interference" in the internal affairs of another country. Both principles were enshrined in the final communiqué of the historical Bandung Conference (18-24 April 1955) in Indonesia. For more than seven decades, Beijing has been drawing on the official narrative of unbroken solidarity with the global South against hegemonism and neo-colonialism. China considers itself as part of the global South, despite its new status as a major global power (the subject of South-South cooperation will be further discussed in Part III.

Inclusiveness

Another noteworthy characteristic feature of the People's Republic strategic narratives is inclusiveness. During recent years, the Belt & Road Initiative has been presented as the most illustrative example of an inclusive long-term vision: a global infrastructure development project, which is open to any country via the Export-Import Bank of China (China Eximbank) or the multilateral AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank). The sole reason for Beijing to exclude an applicant for funding is the rejection of the One-China-Policy.

The reasons for inclusiveness lie in the first foreign policy-related narrative, which is based on the strategic objective to offer an attractive "contrast pattern" to Western normative requirements and places a strong focus on development programs and financing. Theoretically, all countries – including those classified as rogue states in the Western hemisphere, e.g. Iran or Lesotho – are entitled to participate in the BRI development projects. In this

[5] In October 1949, Zhou was appointed both Premier of the Government Administration Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs, quickly earning a reputation as the architect of early PRC foreign policy.

context, among other things, Western embargo policies are effectively thwarted.

Apart from the systemic approach, in contemporary Chinese theorizing, considerable importance is attached to the civilizational aspect of inclusiveness. It should therefore come as no surprise that Beijing has always taken the role of a determined opponent since the early 1990s, against the mainstream "Clash of Civilizations" thesis. The underlying critique is that China, as a secular, non-religion-based civilization is more tolerant than the West and the Islamic world and therefore not aiming at "transforming" other civilizations:

> ...from the cultural point of view, China's secular culture is highly inclusive. Both the Western and Islamic civilizations are religion-based civilizations, which have a strong impulse to transform others. The Chinese civilization is, on the contrary, the only secular one in the world; its openness and inclusiveness are far greater than those exclusive religion-based civilizations.[6]

There is sufficient evidence that the claimed openness and inclusiveness has its limits in the name of cultural identity or under the banner of national security. As a matter of fact, Chinese social science communities are currently analysing the "European refugee crisis" in every detail; but so far, the People's Republic state authorities could not bring themselves to comply with the UNHCR's request to take in more refugees from war and crisis regions.[7]

The relevance and characteristics of Chinese strategic narratives were already outlined at an introductory level. The following text aims to create a better understanding for several relevant Chinese IR narratives, like the anti-hegemonistic narrative, the "Health Silk Road" narrative, and the narrative of "Moral Leadership". The subject of anti-hegemonism always comes into

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[6] Zheng Yongnian/Zhang Chi: "China's International Strategic Choice in the Wave of Deglobalization," in: Institute for Strategic Studies, National Defence University of PLA China (ed.), *International Strategic Relations and China's National Security*, Vol. 3, Singapore 2018, 330.

[7] During recent years, the PR China has become an emerging destination and transit country for refugees but continues to emphasize addressing root causes in countries of origin as solution to the global refugee crisis. The PRC shows little readiness to prioritise or enhance refugee protection or integration on Chinese territory.

play when opponents define and discuss their spheres of influence. Thus, the exploration of Chinese strategic narratives in the field of international relations, is opened by the narrative of China as an "anti-hegemonic global actor".

Strategic narratives and the normative space

Geostrategic competition includes the normative space; the same applies to areas of cooperation. Over the past few years, the discourse on normative space has gained noticeable importance and undergone dynamic development. Specifically in the field of security policy-related analysis, normative pouvoir is becoming increasingly important against this background. Therefore, it seems expedient to address the normative space in addition to the geographical, geostrategic areas and Cyberspace.

What is the relation between narratives and the normative space? It is of fundamental relevance: Narratives are the daily and monthly "fodder" that needs to be fed, no matter whether into the analog or digital sphere. And it is especially the strategic narratives that feed and shape the coordinates of the normative space.

For decades, Chinese social scientists had been complaining loudly that China is lagging a long way behind in the normative space compared to Western countries. The lack of genuine Chinese theory or vision had been identified and deplored, particularly in the sphere of international relations.[8] Since the mid-2000s, Joseph Nye's "Soft Power" theory had been explored extensively by Chinese analysts and was finally mainstreamed to read "soft power with Chinese characteristics". Yet, under the presidency of Hu Jintao, the PR China was still far from having developed its own strategic narratives of major international relevance. In 2009, a report of the US think tank CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies) came to following conclusion:

Despite intense interest at the highest circles, China has yet to develop a comprehensive, coherent national soft-power strategy, although there are disparate policies towards this end. China's soft-power policy remains largely

[8] See: Yaqing Qin (2007), "Why is there No Chinese International Theory?", in: *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* (2007/3), 313-40.

ad hoc and primarily reactive, aiming to counter the China-threat theory and improve China's image abroad.[9]

One decade later, the Xi Jinping era already presents a somehow different picture. In addition to the already existing long-term narrative of the PR China as an advocate for anti-hegemonism, several new narratives have been launched in the international soft-power arena. A "primarily reactive" method of operation has been transformed into a proactive approach. It goes without saying that the Western perception of this approach as an expansive penetration into the global normative space is considered by Beijing as finally "catching up" with a blatant dominance of Western narratives.

In the context of this publication three strategic narratives of the Xi Jinping era seem worth mentioning:

- Within UN structures, the narrative of the "community with a shared future for mankind" has already found its way into several UN resolutions.[10] On a diplomatic level it has been widely accepted in countries of the global South and blended into a larger number of bilateral agreements between the PR China and developing nations. It is strategically well-considered and by no means coincidental that the Chinese position paper for the 75th UN General Assembly of 10 Sep 2020 closes with a declaration of intent on the respective narrative:

  > China will work with countries around the world to uphold and carry forward multilateralism, join the UN on a new journey with renewed commitments, and build a community with a shared future for mankind.[11]

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[9] Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa E. Murphy (2009), "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics – The Ongoing Debate," 10-26, in: ed. Carola McGiffert, *Chinese soft power and its implications for the United States: competition and cooperation in the developing world*, a report of the CSIS smart power initiative, March 2009.

[10] 55th UN Commission for Social Development (February 11, 2017), *Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development*; 72nd UN-General Assembly, First Committee for Disarmament and International Security (November 2, 2017), *No first placement of weapons in outer space* and *Further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space*.

[11] Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1813751.shtml.

- In the framework of the Belt & Road Initiative the narrative of the "mutual benefit and win-win strategy" proposes a new developmental approach, with a strong focus on equality and the economic support of developing nations. Nevertheless, the wording "mutual benefit and win-win strategy" can be found in bilateral agreements with industrial BRI partner countries as well. The normative orientation of this narrative is easily depicted: It includes the idealized picture of economic fairness, despite an asymmetric power balance.
- The third strategic narrative of international significance portrays China as a "responsible great power". Yan Xuetong, professor of International Relations at Beijing Tsinghua University, is one of the founders of this narrative, with his underlying theory of moral realism. According to this theory, the performance of moral responsibility in domestic and international politics increases the leverage of a state on the international community. Yan Xuetong's concept implies that the international order can be more effectively re-shaped by setting good examples instead of using coercion. Furthermore, the theory of moral realism postulates that the dynamics of world order and international stability are influenced and even determined by the moral qualities of major powers.[12]

The latter narrative can claim outstanding international attention. The publications of Yan Xuetong are debated in scientific journals and think tanks, around the world. The underlying postulate of "moral realism" has

[12] Xuetong Yan (2014), "Theory of International Relations of Moral Realism," in *International Studies* (2014/5), 102-27; Xuetong Yan (2016), "Political Leadership and Power Redistribution," in *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2016/9), 1-26, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pow002; Xuetong Yan (2019) "Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers," *Princeton University Press*.

also found its way into security policy-related studies.[13] Johannes Berchtold offers a comprehensive examination in regard to the contradiction between the moral claims and real political orientation of Chinese narratives.

With regard to "successful" narrative settings, there appears to be a certain trend on the Chinese side to anchor and roll out even the smallest advance in the normative space. As Sophie Boisseau du Rocher notes in the Belt & Road Initiative IFRI-study of June 2020:

> Most Chinese projects are now labelled BRI projects, even if their negotiation and implementation began earlier: overall, the BRI has become a mix of old and new projects, all benefiting from the impulse given by the new branding.[14]

It can be assumed that, in the light of growing rivalry in the normative space, this trend will continue to gain momentum. The recent revocation of the broadcasting license for the Chinese state-run TV broadcaster CGTV in England is one of the indicators for the increasing struggle for normative space.

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[13] Michael D. Swaine (2018), "Chinese Views of Foreign Policy in the 19th Party Congress," in *China Leadership Monitor*, Nr. 55; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*; https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf; Deborah Welch Larson (2020), "Can China Change the International System? The Role of Moral Leadership," in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 163-86, doi: 10.1093/cjip/poaa002; Jannika Brostrom (2016), "Morality and the National Interest: Towards a 'Moral Realist' Research Agenda," in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (29/4), 1624-39.

[14] Sophie Boisseau du Rocher (2020), "The Belt and Road: China's 'Community of Destiny' for Southeast Asia?" in *Asie. Visions* (2020/113), IFRI, 19.

China's Health Silk Road Narrative

Barbara Farkas

China's positioning in global health policy

Conceptual development of the narrative

To promote the strategic infrastructure project of the new Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI), the Chinese Health and Family Planning Commission formulated a concept for the first time for the years 2015 to 2017 to support cross-border cooperation in the health sector.[1] The Health Silk Road (HSR) was first publicly mentioned in a speech by Xi Jinping in Uzbekistan in 2016, with a focus on medical treatment and disease prevention.[2] In October 2016, the high-level strategic framework plan "Healthy China 2030" confirmed China's intention to expand its discourse power[3] in the global health sector.[4] In its chapter 26, China explains in detail that it aims to implement its health strategy on the basis of existing bilateral as well as newly developed cooperation mechanisms worldwide, especially within the framework of South-South cooperation. The primary goals of the Health Silk Road include expediency, quality and long-term partnerships. The regional weighting differs: in Asia the focus is on medical care, in Africa

1 NHC (National Health and Family Planning Commission), "Major health exchange and cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative," December 18, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/m/chinahealth/2015-12/18/content_22774412.htm.

2 *Xinhuanet*, "习近平在乌兹别克斯坦最高会议立法院发表演讲时强调. 携手打造绿色、健康、智力、和平的丝绸之路" (Essential points of Xi Jinping's speech in Usbekistan. Hand in hand to build a green, healthy, smart and peaceful Silk Road), June 22, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-06/22/c_1119094645.htm.

3 话语权.

4 State Council, 中共中央 国务院印发 《"健康中国2030"规划纲要》 (*Framework for a "Healthy China 2030"*), October 25, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2016-10/25/content_5124174.htm.

and in the West on the health industry.[5] The Health Silk Road has been a strategic core area of the new Silk Road since 2017 and functions as a multilateral, multi-sectoral and inter-institutional mechanism for emergencies in the regional public health system.[6] In January 2017, China signed a declaration of intent with the World Health Organization (WHO) to cooperate in this area and to take into account the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030.[7] In August 2017, China organized a high-profile international conference in Beijing.[8]

The international impact of the Chinese narrative generally increased. It was accelerated again, especially in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing adjustments that resulted from it. The strategic goals of the Health Silk Road include strengthening China's position in multilateral health policy and promoting the Chinese economy. As effective factors, China relies on improving its international reputation and on support for its international positioning.[9] In international relations, a narrative must always take into account the structure of the world system and thus the characterization of China as a rising and potentially threatening great power. The corresponding narrative therefore presents China as a great power with the readiness to take comprehensive (health policy) responsibility in different areas[10] and as a provider of alternatives within the framework of the existing world order.

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5 Yao Wang et al., "The intentions, needs, advantages and barriers: a survey of twenty-nine countries participating in the 'Belt and Road Initiative' health cooperation," *Global Health Research and Policy*, June 28, 2019, https://ghrp.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s41256-019-0109-z.

6 Jin Chen et al., "Combating infectious disease epidemics through China's Belt and Road Initiative," *NCBI* 13, no. 4 (April 18, 2019), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6472722/#pntd.0007107.ref001.

7 An Baijie, "WHO, China sign pact establishing 'health Silk Road'," *China Daily*, January 19, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017wef/2017-01/19/content_27993857.htm.

8 NHC (National Health and Family Planning Commission of the PRC), "The Belt and Road High-Level Meeting for Health Cooperation: Towards a Health Silk Road, 18. - 20.8.2017," http://en.nhc.gov.cn/Beltandroadforumforhealthcooperation.html.

9 Barbara Farkas, *Die Seidenstraße* (Wien: Heeresdruck, 2020); Kun Tang et al., "China's Silk Road and global health," *The Lancet* 390, no. 10112 (December 9, 2017), https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2817%2932898-2.

10 Xi Jinping, "Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth," Keynote Speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting on January 17, 2017, *Xinhua*: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/18/c_135991184.htm.

An important aspect is the whole of government approach to crisis management. This can be seen, for example, in the partly free and partly commercial mask deliveries made by the Chinese government during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also by local governments, the military, companies and private individuals.[11]

The emphasis is on China's leadership, credibility and lawful approach at the national and international level, for example with respect to scientific competence or China's economic and social resilience. The main fields of action for the international narrative are the multi-layered cooperation in the health sector, internationalization, institutionalization and implementation. Issue-specific narratives concentrate on making concrete decisions and finding solutions. With regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, China used the issue-specific narrative to justify its crisis management and the post-pandemic strategy, as well as to be recognized as a role model.[12] At the national level, the narrative focuses on the identity and values of the actor in the context of international relations, for example on the peaceful development of China[13], the Chinese dream of the renewal of the Chinese nation or the Silk Road. The broad conceptualization gives China unique flexibility in defining and shaping the Health Silk Road, according to the conditions, countries and recipients.

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[11] Xinhua, "As China recovers from COVID-19 blow, Chinese rush to Europe's rescue," March 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/26/c_138916938_2.htm; MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), "State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Gives Interview To Xinhua News Agency and China Media Group On International Situation and China's Diplomacy in 2020," January 2, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1844079.shtml.

[12] CGTN, "Countries take China's lead in building temporary hospitals to fight COVID-19," March 14, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-03-14/Countries-take-China-s-lead-in-building-temporary-COVID-19-hospitals-OQu5a4AOWc/index.html.

[13] MOD (Ministry of National Defense), "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment for China's peaceful development," November 30, 2014, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2014-11/30/content_4554680.htm.

Global health community

With reference to the doctrine of the community of shared destiny of mankind[14] and the moral realignment of international politics, China drafted the narrative of a global health community.[15] The essence of the community of shared destiny corresponds to China's striving for globalization under the umbrella of Chinese standards and thus the expansion of China's normative power:

> China believes that all countries should make the choice that is right for the interests of all humanity and the wellbeing of our future generations. Upholding the vision of a global community of shared future, we should support each other and join hands to contain the spread of the virus and protect the health and wellbeing of people across the globe.[16]

The Health Silk Road serves to build an efficient global public health system[17] with special support directed to developing countries, especially on

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[14] 人类命运共同体. See, for example, Xi Jinping's New Year's speech, MOD (Ministry of National Defense), "国家主席习近平发表二〇二一年新年贺词", http://www.mod.gov.cn/leaders/2020-12/31/content_4876316.htm.

[15] 人类卫生健康共同体. *Xinhua*, "Xi calls for building community of common health for mankind," March 21, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/21/c_138902701.htm; State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*, White Paper, June 7, 2020, http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-06/07/content_76135269.htm; Chinanews, "打造健康丝绸之路正当其时" (The appropriate time for building the Health Silk Road), April 27, 2020, https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/zw/cj/2020/04-27/9168900.shtml; People's Daily Online, "健康丝绸之路" 为生命护航 - 抗击疫情离不开命运共同体意识" (The Health Silk Road to protect life - Fighting a pandemic is inextricably linked with the awareness of the destiny community), March 24, 2020, http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0324/c40531-31645276.html.

[16] State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.

[17] Ibid.; Wang, "Intentions;" Yin He, "Health Silk Road protect lives of all mankind," *People's Daily*, March 25, 2020, http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0325/c90000-9672120.html; Chen, "Combating infectious disease;" Yasiru Ranaraja and Maya Majueran, "Is the 'Health Silk Road' a 'debt-trap' of China's BRI for Sri Lanka?", *CGTN*, April 25, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-25/Is-the-Health-Silk-Road-a-debt-trap-of-China-s-BRI-for-Sri-Lanka--PXqPCPd7Ta/index.html.

the African continent.[18] In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, mask diplomacy and even more vaccine diplomacy[19] acquired a geopolitical and geo-economical dimension. China promised to provide vaccines as a global public good.[20]

China joined the international vaccine initiative Covax (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access) on October 8, 2020. Covax now comprises around 150 countries and international organizations, had an initial research budget of two billion US dollars and strives for a fair distribution of a globally available and affordable Covid vaccine, primarily through centralized vaccine distribution based on population size. The estimated need is eleven billion US-Dollars or two billion vaccine doses in 2021, especially for the 92 poorest countries in the world. The World Health Organization, the global vaccine alliance GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations) and the coalition for innovations in epidemic prevention (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, CEPI) act in the lead.[21] China's Foreign Ministry

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[18] MFA, "State Councilor;" Liying Zhang, "China, Africa support each other in fight against COVID-19," *China.org*, September 2, 2020, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2020-09/02/content_76663093.htm.

[19] CGTN, "China vows to prioritize Philippines' request for vaccine access," July 30, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-07-30/China-vows-to-prioritize-Philippines-request-for-vaccine-access-Sxy6OlYSek/index.html.

[20] Pan Zhaoyi, "Chinese vaccines will be made global public good, says Xi," *CGTN*, May 19, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-19/Chinese-vaccines-will-be-made-global-public-good-says-Xi-QCpFSGlL2g/index.html; State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*; Xinhua, "China to provide COVID-19 vaccines to the world at reasonable price," September 30, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/30/c_139410105.htm; MFA, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on November 17, 2020," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1833054.shtml; China.org, "China, Africa fighting COVID-19 pandemic shoulder to shoulder," December 15, 2020, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2020-12/15/content_77013493.htm.

[21] MFA, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Remarks on China Joining COVAX," October 9, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t1822631.shtml; Forschung & Lehre, „China schließt sich globaler Covax-Impfstoff-Initiative an," October 9, 2020, https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/china-schliesst-sich-globaler-covax-impfstoff-initiative-an-3172/.

spokeswoman Hua Chunying commented on China's accession to Covax as follows:

> This is an important step China has taken to uphold the concept of a shared community of health for all and to honour its commitment to turn Covid-19 vaccines into a global public good.[22]

China used the strategic opportunities and underlined its fairness, especially in contrast to the USA. After the USA had suspended funding for the World Health Organization in April 2020 - portrayed by China as a lack of solidarity - China made an additional contribution of 50 million US-Dollars to the WHO to fight pandemics and to expand the public health system in developing countries. A further two billion US-Dollars will be donated in cooperation with the WHO and the African Union to 82 countries to combat the health crisis. China is also suspending debt services.[23] Even if western pharmaceutical companies win the competition for market approval for vaccines, which is associated with economic and symbolic weight, the availability and affordability of Chinese vaccines will shape the relationship between China and the developing countries in the long term in favour of China. China repeatedly listed its medical support to other countries in the course of the Covid-19 crisis in detail. This concerns, for example, the effective use of industrial production and export capacities, the dispatch of medical teams, the establishment of joint expert groups, the exchange of information, the number of recipients (countries and organizations) or the specific products such as masks, test sets or ventilators.[24]

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22 MFA, "Remarks on China Joining COVAX."

23 He, "Health Silk Road;" Xinhua, "China's donation to WHO for coronavirus prevention, control," March 9, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/09/c_138859577.htm; State Council Information Office, *White Paper on China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, January 10, 2021, http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=233&lib=dbref&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword=; State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.

24 Xinhua, "Reality Check of US Allegations Against China on COVID-19," May 10, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/10/c_139044103.htm; MFA, "State Councillor," David Stanway, "China doubles down on COVID narrative as WHO investigation looms," *Reuters*, January 5, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-china-who-int-idUSKBN29A0LX.

International legitimacy & leadership

China laid claim to leadership and justified its international legitimacy with a sense of responsibility, scientific approach as well as cooperation and implementation within the framework of international organizations.

> In international cooperation on joint prevention and control, it is essential that major countries take the initiative, fulfil their responsibilities and do their share of the work.[25]

China's complex self-image as a great power[26] has developed since the 1990s. It results from numerous factors, such as the formative influence of the USA, strategic considerations, events, ideational influences at home, social demands in international society or the instrumentalization to improve its image. The internal Chinese debate is more and more shifting to the international perspective that China should increasingly take on global responsibility.[27] The development policy perspective and the sceptical perspective that global responsibility serves to contain China receded into the background.[28] In his keynote address at the World Economic Forum in January 2017, Xi Jinping underlined:

> We should strike a balance between efficiency and equity to ensure that different countries, different social strata and different groups of people all share in the benefits of economic globalization. The people of all countries expect nothing less from us, and this is our unshirkable responsibility as leaders of our times.[29]

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25 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.
26 Jinping, "Jointly Shoulder Responsibility."
27 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.
28 Hoo Tiang Boon, *China's Global Identity. Considering the Responsibilities of Great Power* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018).
29 Jinping, "Jointly Shoulder Responsibility."

Scientific approach

The (natural) scientific approach is an important element in the Chinese narrative and actively serves to increase persuasiveness. The roots of this Chinese thought lie in the scientific worldview of Marxism-Leninism. China, for example, placed its previous health policy successes and scientific successes at home and abroad in the foreground as a role model.[30] This includes building up its national health system, the knowledge gained and lessons learned since Sars 2003, China's help with the Ebola epidemic in Africa from 2014 to 2016 and its effective fight against Covid-19. China announced active support for a scientific (and not a political) investigation into the emergence of the pandemic[31], which finally took place from January 14th to February 10th, 2021, and was organised by the WHO in China.[32] The Chinese side presented scientific data or explained the scientific challenges[33] and laboratory safety in China. China preferably referred to specialist journals, for example with regard to the natural development of the Corona virus. An example is the reference by the nationwide English-language Global Times[34] to the international scientific journal Current Biology.[35] The

30 The Lancet, "Facing forwards along the Health Silk Road," vol. 5, no. 10 (October 2017), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7128673/.

31 Phoebe Zhang, "China backs WHO investigating origin of Covid-19, hits out at US 'politicising issue'," *SCMP*, May 7, 2020.

32 "WHO-convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part," *Joint WHO-China Study*, January 14 – February 10, 2021, https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/origins-of-the-virus.

33 Xinhua, "News analysis: Why is coronavirus origin tracing a challenging task for scientists?", May 20, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/20/c_139072317.htm.

34 Global Times, "Discovery of close relative of novel coronavirus offers evidence of its natural origin," May 14, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1188335.shtml.

35 Hong Zhou et al., "A Novel Bat Coronavirus Closely Related to SARS-CoV-2 Contains Natural Insertions at the S1/S2 Cleavage Site of the Spike Protein," *Current Biology* 30, no. 11 (June 8, 2020), 2196-2203, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmid/32416074/.

state news agency Xinhua[36] cites The Lancet[37], Nature Medicine[38] and a statement signed by 27 international scientists.[39]

In its White Paper "Fighting Covid-19", China recorded the various areas and mechanisms of cooperation. It presented its multi-level approach as well as its category-specific, region-specific, dynamic and targeted access to disease control. Furthermore, it explained the classification into risk levels on the basis of a comprehensive evaluation of numerous factors, such as the number of infections in relation to the population in a certain period of time:[40]

> China has carried out international exchanges and cooperation on scientific research. China has strengthened communication and exchanges with the WHO, conducted exchanges and cooperation with other countries on research in virus traceability, medicines, vaccines, and testing, shared scientific research data and information, and jointly studied prevention, control and treatment strategies. The Ministry of Science and Technology, the NHC [National Health Commission], the China Association for Science and Technology, and the Chinese Medical Association have jointly put in place a Covid-19 Academic Research Communication Platform for worldwide researchers to release results and participate in discussion. By May 31 [2020], a total of 104 journals and 970 papers and reports had been posted.[41]

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36 Xinhua, "Truth in China's pandemic battle smashes absurd U.S. allegations," May 11, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/11/c_139045957.htm; Xinhua, "Reality Check."

37 Roujian Lu et al., "Genomic characterisation and epidemiology of 2019 novel coronavirus: implications for virus origins and receptor binding," *The Lancet* 395: 565–74 (January 29, 2020), https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930251-8.

38 Christian G. Andersen, "The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2," *Nature Medicine* 26, 450–52 (2020), https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9; Nature, "Stop the coronavirus stigma now," Editorial April 7, 2020, Nature 580, no. 165 (2020), https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01009-0.

39 Charles Calisher et al., "Statement in support of the scientists, public health professionals, and medical professionals of China combatting COVID-19," *The Lancet* 395, no. 10226, e42-e43, March 7, 2020, https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930418-9.

40 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.

41 Ibid.

The strategic domestic political environment is inseparable from international legitimacy. The Covid-19 pandemic represents a health, economic and socio-political crisis for China. The government's legitimacy is based on economic development and its own credibility which is based on its technocratic competence. China's narrative underlines that progress and competence, such as the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and its (economic) consequences, are definitely compatible with an authoritarian system as a sub-order within the liberal world order. The Chinese narrative emphasizes the resilience potential[42] of China and the support potential for global recovery through the Silk Road and in particular the Health Silk Road.[43] The narrative of the decline of the West[44] that has existed since the 2008 financial crisis has been reinforced.[45] China presents itself as effective, far-sighted, united and stable. The economic forecast is positive despite Covid-19 and a global boost.[46] The respective ideology does not determine the cooperation per se, but only the degree of intensity of the cooperation with certain countries.[47] China also sees its efficiency and transparency as confirmed by the United Nations[48] and the WHO[49]. China rejects the accusation of political or propaganda intentions.[50] Uniform external

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42 Ibid.

43 State Council Information Office, "BRI projects can help global recovery," September 21, 2020, http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2020-09/21/content_76724982.htm.

44 东升西降.

45 Sohu, "新发展阶段新在哪里？陈一新从八个方面进行阐释" (Where is the next stage of development? Chen Yixin's [Secretary General of the Central Commission for Politics and Rights] explanations from eight perspectives), January 15, 2021, https://www.sohu.com/a/444668793_118060.

46 MFA, "Zhao Lijian's Press Conference."

47 The Asan Institute of Policy Studies, "Challenge in the Era of Chaos," February 1, 2021, http://en.asaninst.org/contents/challenge-in-the-era-of-chaos/.

48 Xinhua, "UN General Assembly president urges avoiding rumours about coronavirus, emphasizes solidarity," February 9, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/09/c_138767676.htm.

49 MFA, "Xi Jinping meets with visiting World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus," January 29, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1737014.shtml; MFA, "Zhao Lijian's Press Conference".

50 Xinhua, "Reality Check."

communication is one of China's strengths, as is logistical performance, reliability as a partner and the activation of a large number of Chinese players.

China's resilience for global benefit

China had already emphasized its social and economic resilience before the Covid pandemic. During the crisis, China's comprehensive resilience and the resulting positive effects for the whole world were all the more central:

> The unity and perseverance of the Chinese people have impressed the world. The resilience and dynamism of China's development have won global recognition.[51]

In the Chinese narrative, resilience in general and its specific cornerstones were emphasized, such as the acceptance of the situation, the solution orientation, abandoning the victim role, taking responsibility for oneself and finally also for others, future planning, optimism and network thinking.[52] China underlined both its capabilities and capacities to withstand and recover from the Covid crisis as a disruptive event. The central government specified the policy measures and implementation. At the same time, the local governments enjoyed a great deal of autonomy for the conception and implementation of additional support measures at home and abroad. China's resilience is based on the complex combination of the characteristics of the Covid crisis, institutional and organizational experience with previous pandemics such as Sars 2003, government measures and the regional industrial structure.

In the health sector, resilience affects the population and the health system, which is to be expanded internationally through the Health Silk Road. Social resilience includes the social structure, which comprises the population

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51 MFA, "Wang Yi Gives Interview."

52 See e.g. State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*; Huiwen Gong et al., "Regional Resilience in Times of a Pandemic Crisis: The Case of Covid-19 in China," in *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* vol. 111, no. 3 (2020), 497–512; Hui Zhang and Xinzhi Wang, "Community Resilience and Public Safety Research in China," in *Strengthening Social Resilience, Building Social Capital: Perspectives from Israel and China*, ed. Reuven Gal and Shlomo Maital (Haifa: Samuel Neaman Institute, 2017), 83-88, https://www.neaman.org.il/EN/Files/Strengthening%20Social%20 Resilience.pdf.

structure and the state organizations at the municipal level and has a long-term effect. Social resilience also includes psychological aspects and the digital information systems, both of which have a short-term effect. China's vulnerability is defined by a combination of different factors. These include the awareness of the dangers, the nature of the infrastructure, the implementation of public order, the available resources and the organizational capacity for crisis management.

Fields of action

Health cooperation

Almost 60 bilateral health agreements exist within the framework of the Silk Road until now. General health care is to be improved, including through research collaborations and collaboration in health systems within the framework of the world health order, especially in the Silk Road countries. This affects the formulation of guidelines for health promotion, as well as for research and medical companies. In addition, there is the promotion of specialist training, investments and financing opportunities as well as the strengthening of global support. The health infrastructure is being expanded. The exchange of medical goods and services as well as medical concepts and practices between the countries is to be strengthened.

Mask and vaccine diplomacy

After the pandemic broke out, China appealed to the international community and received relief supplies and payments from around 60 countries. Roles quickly changed, and China became a pragmatic supplier of aid to almost every country in the world, regardless of the existence of diplomatic relations.[53] Before the Covid-19 pandemic, China had produced half of the global market share of protective equipment products. Chinese engagement increased significantly in general in Latin America and in the Arab world. As of December 9, 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were the first countries to approve a Chinese vaccine, followed by Egypt,

[53] Lina Gong, "COVID-19: Is the Humanitarian Sector Prepared?", *RSIS Commentary* no. 036 (March 11, 2020): https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CO20036.pdf.

Brazil, Indonesia and Turkey. By January 2021, 26 countries had concluded vaccine supply agreements with China, and ten already had an (emergency) vaccine approval. Phase 3 studies on the vaccines from five Chinese manufacturers were carried out in 18 countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Arab countries.[54]

The Chinese company Sinovac will be able to produce two billion doses of its vaccine Coronavac annually from 2021. As of March 2021, 70 million doses had been administered worldwide. CanSino Biologics' annual production capacity for Convidecia (AD5-nCOV) is 500 million doses, with a single vaccination being sufficient contrary to Coronavac and Sinopharm. Sinopharm administered 80 million doses and delivered 100 million doses through March 2021. Its production capacity reaches three billion doses yearly. Local productions, partly with an export license, exist e. g. in the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Malaysia. China's willingness to transfer technology and knowledge was decisive for building up cooperation in clinical tests and enhancing local capacities, for example with regard to the safety protocols. Sinopharm has unrestricted approval, which goes beyond the emergency approval, in Bahrain and the Seychelles, and Sinovac in Malaysia. In China, ten million people had been vaccinated by mid-January 2021.

The thematic world map and the tables pictured below show the geographic distribution respectively the global acceptance of the Chinese Corona vaccines in over 75 countries as of the end of March 2021. The percentage of the population fully vaccinated with Chinese vaccines is shown on a colour scale per country. The vaccines from Sinovac, Sinopharm and CanSino Biologics are taken into account and adjusted according to the number of vaccination doses required: two each from Sinovac and Sinopharm or one vaccine dose from CanSino. Agreements, as far as publicly known, as well as commercial and free deliveries, some of which were also

[54] CGTN, "Leaders from several countries praise China for COVID-19 vaccines," February 14, 2021, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-02-13/Foreign-leaders-express-heartfelt-gratitude-to-China-for-vaccine-aid-XQIuXmYvwA/index.html; CGTN, "More countries turn to Chinese COVID-19 vaccines," February 16, 2021, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-02-16/More-countries-turn-to-Chinese-COVID-19-vaccines-XVa5bOk0zC/index.html.

made via third countries, are considered.[55] The proportion of free deliveries was comparatively low and mostly took place after the commercial vaccine was ordered. China's planned Covax contingent of ten million vaccine doses is not included.[56]

Measured by the percentage of the respective population who were able to be completely immunized against Corona with Chinese vaccines on the basis of previous agreements or deliveries, Indonesia (36 %) and Malaysia (30 %) rank first in the Indo-Pacific region. It is followed by Cambodia (20 %), the Maldives (19 %), the Philippines (12 %), Pakistan (10 %) and Thailand (5 %). Other regions of the world benefited from the Chinese vaccines to a greater extent, such as Chile (62 %), Turkey (60 %), Peru (58 %) and Morocco (56 %). In the United Arab Emirates, the specific volume is unknown due to the local production license for Sinopharm.

The map of the global distribution of Chinese Corona vaccines does not show a clear course along the Silk Road corridors, but rather the situation-related reaction of China, based, for example, on the infection rate, the logistical requirements or existing bilateral relationships. The map corresponds to the Chinese perspective that *"China has friends all over the world"*, especially in the coastal countries:

> China is above-board and open and remains committed to developing friendly and cooperative relations with all countries in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Take a look at a world map, you will find China have friends all over the world.[57]

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[55] Numerous sources, e.g. CGTN, "More countries"; Hui Zhang and Yuwei Hu, "At least 17 countries have purchased China-produced COVID-19 vaccines", *Global Times*, January 14, 2021, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212864.shtml; Weltbank, "Population 2019," https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.

[56] Reuters, "China to provide 10 million vaccine doses to COVAX initiative," February 3, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-china-idUSKBN2A30VZ.

[57] MFA, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on March 24, 2021," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1863896.shtml.

Global distribution resp. acceptance of Chinese Covid Vaccines (by March 31, 2021)

(Percentage of the population fully vaccinated with Chinese vaccines)

	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Europe & Caucasus						
Albania		1.000.000		via Turkey	2,85	17,52%
Belarus	100.000				9,47	0,53%
Bosnia		30.000		via Turkey	3,30	0,45%
Czech Republic	interested				10,67	
Georgia	100.000				3,72	1,34%
Hungary	5.000.000		approved		9,77	25,59%
Moldavia	2.000			via UAE	2,66	0,04%
Montenegro	30.000				0,62	2,41%
North Macedonia	200.000				2,08	4,80%
Poland	interested				37,97	
Serbia	3.500.000				6,94	25,20%
Turkey		100.000.000			83,43	59,93%
Ukraine		1.800.000			44,39	1,35%

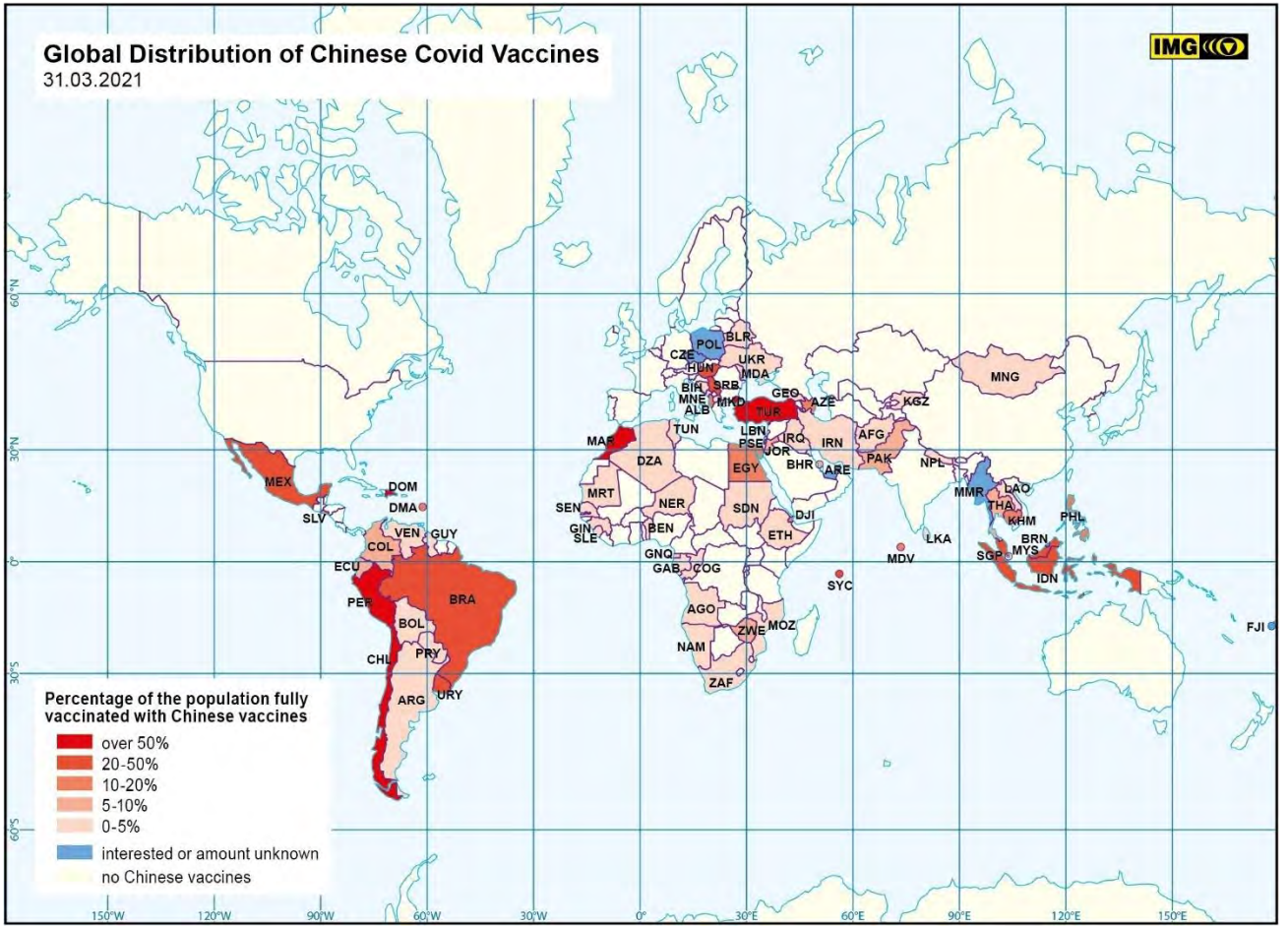
	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Central & South Asia						
Afghanistan	400.000				38,04	0,53%
Azerbaijan		4.000.000			10,02	19,95%
Kyrgyz Republic	150.000				6,46	1,16%
Maldives	200.000				0,53	18,83%
Mongolia	300.000				3,23	4,65%
Nepal	800.000				28,61	1,40%
Pakistan	1.700.000		20.000.000		216,57	9,63%
Sri Lanka	600.000				21,80	1,38%

	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Southeast Asia						
Brunei	amount unclear				0,43	amount unclear
Cambodia	1.000.000	5.500.000			16,49	19,71%
Indonesia	15.000.000	140.000.000	20.000.000		270,63	36,03%
Laos	300.000				7,17	2,09%
Malaysia		**12.000.000**	3.500.000		31,95	29,73%
Myanmar	approved	approved			54,05	amount unclear
Philippines		25.600.000			108,12	11,84%
Singapore		200.000			5,70	1,75%
Thailand		7.000.000			69,63	5,03%

	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Africa						
Algeria	200.000				43,05	0,23%
Angola	200.000				31,83	0,31%
Benin		203.000			11,80	0,86%
Congo, Republic of	100.000				5,38	0,93%
Djibouti		300.000			0,97	15,41%
Egypt	40.000.000				100,39	19,92%
Equatorial Guinea	100.000				1,36	3,69%
Ethiopia	300.000				112,08	0,13%
Gabon	100.000				2,17	2,30%
Guinea	200.000				12,77	0,78%
Marocco	41.000.000				36,47	56,21%
Mauritania	50.000				4,53	0,55%
Mozambique	200.000				30,37	0,33%
Namibia	100.000				2,49	2,00%
Niger	400.000				23,31	0,86%
Senegal	200.000				16,30	0,61%
Seychelles	**50.000**				0,10	25,61%
Sierra Leone	200.000				7,81	1,28%
South Africa		5.000.000			58,56	4,27%
Sudan	250.000				42,81	0,29%
Tunisia		200.000			11,69	0,86%
Zimbabwe	2.000.000	1.000.000			14,65	10,24%

	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Arab Countries						
Bahrain	**300.000**				1,64	9,14%
Iran	250.000				82,91	0,15%
Iraq	2.000.000				39,31	2,54%
Jordan	2.000.000				10,10	9,90%
Libanon	50.000				6,86	0,36%
Palestine	100.000				4,69	1,07%
United Arab Emirates	local production				9,77	amount unclear

	Sinopharm (2 doses)	Sinovac (2 doses)	CanSino (1 dose)	Note	Population in Mio.	Fully vaccinated population in %
Latin America						
Argentina	904.000				44,94	1,01%
Bolivia	500.000	approved			11,51	2,17%
Brazil		130.000.000			211,05	30,80%
Chile		20.000.000	1.800.000		18,95	62,26%
Columbia		10.000.000			50,34	9,93%
Dominica	20.000				0,07	13,93%
Dominican Republic	768.000	10.000.000			10,74	50,14%
Ecuador		2.000.000			17,37	5,76%
El Salvador		2.000.000			6,45	15,50%
Guyana	20.000				0,78	1,28%
Mexiko	12.000.000	20.000.000	35.000.000		127,58	39,98%
Paraguay		20.000		via Chile	7,04	0,14%
Peru	38.000.000				32,51	58,44%
Urugay		1.750.000			3,46	25,28%
Venezuela	500.000				28,52	0,88%


Global Distribution of Chinese Covid Vaccines
31.03.2021
IMG
Percentage of the population fully vaccinated with Chinese vaccines
over 50%
20-50%
10-20%
5-10%
0-5%
interested or amount unknown
no Chinese vaccines
60°N
30°N
0°
30°S
60°S
150°W
120°W
90°W
60°W
30°W
0°
30°E
60°E
90°E
120°E
150°E
MEX
DOM
DMA
SLV
VEN
GUY
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ECU
PER
BRA
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PRY
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ARG
URY
POL
BLR
CZE
UKR
HUN
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AZE
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Institutionalization & implementation

The structural reform and institutionalization that was started years ago includes the Chinese healthcare industry, international cooperation mechanisms and communication. To steer public opinion, China basically has a network of experienced actors with multiple and differentiated identities. The party directives, the foreign policy goals and the current circumstances are taken into account. This was set out in a pragmatic strategic plan at the beginning of 2017.[58] Based on the experience of fighting Ebola in Africa, China improved its inter-ministerial and international communication and cooperation.[59]

With the establishment of a new agency for international development cooperation in April 2018, China upgraded the role of the Ministry of Health and the Disease Control Center.[60] With a view to working with the World Health Organization and the United Nations, China is establishing the four networks of public health, political research, the hospital alliance and the health industry as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 in order to continuously look for opportunities for cooperation.[61] China draws up specific development plans for the pharmaceutical, biotechnological and medical device industries, inter alia. The health sector and the general restructuring of the science and technology sector represent a key component for China as part of its global strategy.

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58 Xinhua, "关于实施中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程的意见" (Proposals for the process implementation to spread and develop the exceptional traditional Chinese culture), January 25, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-01/25/c_1120383155.htm.

59 Tang, "China's Silk Road."

60 Lincoln Chen and Minhui Yang, "New opportunities for China in global health," *The Lancet Global Health* 6, no. 7 (July 28, 2018), https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/langlo/PIIS2214-109X(18)30263-8.pdf.

60 NHC, "Major health exchange."

61 Wang, "Intentions;" Tang, "China's Silk Road."

To expand its extensive national strength, China relies on its discourse power[62], especially under President Xi Jinping, who has an excellent command of traditional Chinese rhetoric. As early as 2013, Xi Jinping underlined the need for storytelling[63], positive references[64], new propaganda formats[65], the spread of the Chinese voice[66] and the ability to present China's perspective in an advantageous manner[67]. The strategic basis is a multi-dimensional concept and a comprehensive structural reform in the past few years. Its main elements are a stronger external orientation, a centralized and hierarchical top-down governance, the integration of party and state as well as ideological control. The aim is to strengthen the efficiency and coherence of internal and external communication. The official definition of discourse power remains vague and, depending on the perspective, is equated with the right to speak or national, diplomatic or media assertiveness. In any case, in the traditional Chinese perspective, the discourse corresponds to the monopoly of knowledge, morality and status.[68]

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62 Xinhua, "习近平：意识形态工作是党的一项极端重要的工作" (Xi Jinping: Ideological work is an extremely important issue for the party), August 20, 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-08/20/c_117021464_3.htm; Caixin, "习近平讲述" "中国故事". 诠释官方外交语言新 "温度" (Xi Jinping tells about the "China story." Explanatory notes concerning the new "temperature" of the diplomatic language), April 23, 2015, http://www.caixin.com/2015-04-23/100802893.html.

63 我们要加强宣传报道.

64 积极借鉴.

65 创新对外宣传方式.

66 传播好中国声音.

67 讲好中国故事.

68 Kejin Zhao, "China's rise and its discursive power strategy," *Chinese Political Science Review* no. 1 (2016), 544.

International organizations

Global recognition, especially through international organizations, is of great importance for China and its international legitimacy. The WHO praised China's national health policy development as a model as well as the potential of the Health Silk Road and its consistency with the goals of the WHO:[69]

> The Belt and Road Initiative contains the fundamentals to achieve universal health coverage: infrastructure, access to medicines, human resources, and a platform to share experience and promote best practices.[70]

The strategic partnership with China proposed by the WHO focuses on the vulnerable countries along the Silk Road. These include numerous crises, conflict and post-conflict countries. The regional focus is on Africa and the health policy on disease control as the basis for global health security. The WHO underlines the importance of health as a human right: *"Health is a human right. People should never have to choose between getting the care they need and financial hardship or impoverishment."*[71] China welcomes the active participation of the WHO concerning the Health Silk Road.[72] At the international level, for example at the BRICS summit, the G20 summit or the World Economic Forum, Xi Jinping underscored China's successes in fighting pandemics. At the same time, China supports the international organizations, such as the

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69 MFA, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Daily Briefing Online on February 3, 2020," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1739548.shtml; WHO, "Universal Health Coverage: The Key to a 21st-Century Health System," 2017, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/universal-health-coverage-the-key-to-a-21st-century-health-system; WHO, "Towards a Health Silk Road," August 18, 2017, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/towards-a-health-silk-road.

70 WHO, "Towards a Health Silk Road."

71 Ibid.

72 中国欢迎世界卫生组织积极参与"一带一路"建设，共建"健康丝绸之路, in *People's Daily Online*, "健康丝绸之路" (Health Silk Road).

coordinating role of the WHO.[73] In the United Nations in particular, China is striving to expand its influence.[74] Secretary-General Guterres praised China's pandemic containment efforts, which *"gave the world valuable time for strategic decision-making."*[75]

China's cooperation with the global vaccine alliance GAVI, which began in 2002, is a good example of the functioning of a global health community. GAVI initially supported China with the introduction of the hepatitis B vaccine. In 2015, China changed from being a recipient of aid to a country with sustainable self-financing and an active supporter of GAVI. For the period from 2016 to 2020, China provided GAVI with five million US-Dollars and increased this amount to 20 million US-Dollars for the period from 2021 to 2025.[76]

Strategic aspects of the Health Silk Road

In shaping the future global health governance in a sustainable manner, China aims to play a major role with its growing professional and organizational capacities.[77] Global health governance serves to protect health worldwide through collective action using common mechanisms. Standardization, financing and governance play a key role - and form the basis for the normative effect. Infrastructure development is a key component of health security and disease preparedness. There is a direct correlation between the availability of efficient and resilient infrastructure, such as

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[73] CGTN, "Liu Xiaoming: China is a COVID-19 victim, not producer of the pandemic," May 1, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-01/Liu-Xiaoming-China-is-a-COVID-19-victim-not-producer-of-the-pandemic-Q84xUWVxja/index.html; Foreign Minister Wang Yi, "China to build community of health with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia," *Xinhua*, September 18, 2020, http://en.pkulaw.cn/Search/DisplayInfo.aspx?lib=news&id=28050.

[74] State Council, "中共中央关于制定国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和 二〇三五年远景目标的建议" (Proposals on Formulating the Fourteenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2021 - 2025) and the Long-term Goals for 2035), November 3, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-11/03/content_5556991.htm.

[75] Reuters, "World should learn lessons from China in coronavirus fight," March 17, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-editorial/world-should-learn-lessons-from-china-in-coronavirus-fight-china-daily-idUSKBN21403U.

[76] Gavi, "China," https://www.gavi.org/investing-gavi/funding/donor-profiles/china.

[77] Wang, "Intentions;" Tang, "China's Silk Road;" NHC, "Major health exchange."

transportation, electricity, or telecommunications, and public health capacity.[78] The Health Silk Road also helps China maintain the relevance of the Silk Road, especially during the Covid-19 crisis. It uses the same logistics hubs and market accesses.[79] As a sectoral extension of the Silk Road, it serves complementary interests. It is increasingly linked to the Digital Silk Road, for example in diagnostics, telemedicine or quarantine monitoring.

Projection & reception of China's narrative

The interactivity determines the effectiveness and sustainability of the narrative and the messages; their coherence is therefore important. To strengthen its discourse power, China uses its pandemic-specific identity as a cooperative fighter[80], which has a strong mobilization potential, within the framework of a regional narrative. For international communication, China relies on public diplomacy at various levels and on the media that are indispensable[81] for an effect.[82] The latter includes positive valuations from a foreign perspective[83] or the manipulation of information, such as (unjustified) criticism of the supposed inaction of the European Union.[84]

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78 Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, *Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Its Implications for Infrastructure Priorities*, March 25, 2020, https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2020/_download/Background-Impact-of-Covid-19-and-Implications-on-Infrastructure-Priorities.pdf.

79 Chen, "Combating infectious disease."

80 Xinhua, "Foreign political party leaders express confidence in China's defeating coronavirus," February 14, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/14/c_138781438.htm; Xinhua, "China-S. Korea cooperation against COVID-19 effective, exemplary," March 9, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/14/c_139054494.htm.

81 Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *Die Kultur und ihre Narrative. Eine Einführung* (Vienna and New York: Springer, 2008), 174.

82 Zhao, "China's rise," 557f.

83 Xinhua, "Swift, decisive, transparent, cooperative - China buying world time in fight against coronavirus epidemic," February 4, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/04/c_138755660.htm.

84 European Council, "Report on the comprehensive economic policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic," April 9, 2020, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/09/report-on-the-comprehensive-economic-policy-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/.

Narratives are based on intentions and goals and are a learning process. They contain an initial situation, a disruptive problem and a solution. The dynamic and ongoing adaptation of the Chinese narrative begins with questioning the origin of the virus and shifts to effective virus control and finally to global aid from China. The narrative thread and the desired perception of China's crisis management changed in the course of the pandemic from reactive and defensive to active and offensive. Similarly, China's identity changed from being a victim[85] to being a fighter[86] and eventually becoming a contributor[87] on the international level.

China increasingly emphasized its transparent, timely and correct approach with a chronological listing of events and the measures taken, for example in its own White Paper[88] and in international science journals such as The Lancet:[89]

> China has always acted with openness, transparency and responsibility, and informed the international community of developments of the epidemic in a timely manner.[90]

On counter-narratives and accusations, which mainly come from the West, China goes into detail and based on facts, in particular on the emergence of the pandemic, on China's crisis management and its active international cooperation. The counter-narratives include allegations of bribery of the WHO or the economic gain from the pandemic. The presumed consideration of China by the WHO results from the toothless mandate without sanction mechanisms, the principle of unanimity and the chronic underfunding of the WHO. Therefore, a policy of appeasement is the only

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85 MFA, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on April 30, 2020," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1775332.shtml; CGTN, "Liu Xiaoming."

86 Xinhua, "Swift, decisive;" MFA, "Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference."

87 Reuters, "World should learn;" Xinhua, "China's donation;" State Council Information Office, *White Paper Development Cooperation*.

88 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.

89 Chaolin Huang et al., "Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China," *The Lancet* 395: 497-506 (January 24, 2020), https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930183-5.

90 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*.

way to ensure the cooperation of the affected countries. Lack of transparency is a general structural problem in international disease protection.[91] The stricter Chinese customs regulations for medical exports were used for quality assurance and by no means as export restrictions.

The multi-layered argumentation regarding the origin of the virus is exemplary, with China rejecting the term "China Virus" and the reference to Wuhan as a politicization of the pandemic.[92] China cites the WHO and the lack of specific evidence that the virus originated in Wuhan[93] or the possibility that the virus had previously appeared outside of Wuhan or even China.[94] In general, China refers to the WHO rules of 2015 for naming new infectious diseases[95], to related admonitions from the British science magazine Nature[96] and to the naming by the WHO as Covid-19 on February 11, 2020.[97] China cites several studies from the beginning of 2020 on the natural formation of viruses via bats, for example in The Lancet[98] and in Nature[99].

The blame assignment, put forth by e.g. the USA and Australia, clearly shows the geopolitical dimension and the complexity of the Global Health Governance narrative. Narratives shape identity, chronology and the reconstruction of knowledge. They work in context, influence each other

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91 Jan Thiel, „Das Dilemma der WHO im globalen Seuchenschutz", *CSS Analysen zur Sicherheitspolitik* Nr. 268 (August 2020), https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse268-DE.pdf.

92 State Council Information Office, *Fighting COVID-19*; Xinhua, "Reality Check."

93 WHO, "COVID-19 Virtual Press conference," May 4, 2020, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/who-audio-emergencies-coronavirus-press-conference-04may2020.pdf?sfvrsn=3ef4c516_4.

94 MFA, "Zhao Lijian's Press Conference;" A. Deslandes et al., "SARS-CoV-2 was already spreading in France in late December 2019," *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents* 55, no. 6 (June 2020).

95 WHO, "World Health Organization best practices for the naming of new human infectious diseases," May 15, 2015, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HSE-FOS-15.1.

96 Nature, "Stop the coronavirus stigma now."

97 WHO, "Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report–22," February 11, 2020, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200211-sitrep-22-ncov.pdf?sfvrsn=fb6d49b1_2.

98 Lu, "Genomic characterization"; Calisher, "Statement in support."

99 Andersen, "The proximal origin;" Nature, "Stop the coronavirus stigma now."

and have a stabilizing effect.[100] As an actor, China is characterized both by its self-image and by how it is perceived by others. The situational narrative relates to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the context also includes the liberal world order, geopolitical tensions or specific threat perceptions. The narratives work on the national and international level as well as issue specific.

The European Union showed *"gratitude for the support"* during the Corona crisis, for example the centre for the coordination of emergency measures within the framework of the EU's civil protection[101], but also scepticism. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, warned of the geopolitical component in the *"global battle of narratives"*. Because China's *"policy of charity"* in the context of its mask diplomacy "*serves to expand its influence"*[102], for example by means of disinformation.[103] At the 22nd EU-China summit on June 22nd, 2020, the EU underlined the shared responsibility to participate in global efforts to stop the spread of the virus and to boost research on treatments and vaccines in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU also called on China to fully participate in the independent review of lessons learned from the international health response to Covid-19.[104]

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100 Müller-Funk, *Die Kultur und ihre Narrative.*

101 European Union, "Coronakrise: Chinesische Hilfslieferung an die EU erreicht Italien," April 6, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/ip_20_600.

102 EEAS (European External Action Service), "EU HRVP Josep Borrell: The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating," March 24, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en.

103 EUvsDiSiNFO, "Disinformation on the coronavirus – short assessment of the information environment," March 19, 2020, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-disinformation-on-the-coronavirus-short-assessment-of-the-information-environment/.

104 Council of the EU, "EU-China Summit: Defending EU interests and values in a complex and vital partnership - Press release by President Michel and President von der Leyen," June 22, 2020, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2020/06/22/eu-china-summit-defending-eu-interests-and-values-in-a-complex-and-vital-partnership/.

The African Union was grateful to China for the material and financial support in the fight against Corona as well as the basic solidarity:[105]

> China and Africa are firm supporters of multilateralism and important forces for world peace and development. […] China will continue to support the African Union's Africa Joint Continental Strategy for Covid-19 Outbreak and Africa's efforts to build stronger public health prevention and control systems.[106]

For its part, China emphasizes reciprocity, long-term good relations and its solidarity with developing countries.[107]

Outlook & conclusions

Both the discourse and the concepts of the Health Silk Road are based on fundamental and successively built structures in the strategic and institutional area, which China can access in a flexible manner if required. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the dynamism and international impact of the narrative and normative power of China. In line with its change of identity and the desired external perception, China continuously adapted its narrative. China presented itself as a pandemic victim, then as a fighter against Covid-19 and finally again - in accordance with the original intention of the Health Silk Road - as a global stakeholder who contributes to health security at the international level.

A look at the European Union's 2020 strategic cooperation agenda with China shows that the EU is generally strengthening dialogue and exchange with China in the health sector, for example through joint research and innovation initiatives.[108] In addition, the EU-China investment agreement of

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105 African Union, "China Donates Medical Supplies to African Union Commission," February 23, 2020, https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20201023/china-donates-medical-supplies-african-union-commission; China.org, "China, Africa fighting COVID-19."

106 China.org, "China, Africa fighting COVID-19,"

107 Xinhua, "China-Africa Cooperation Prospers against Covid-19," January 3, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/03/c_139638729.htm; Zhang, "China, Africa."

108 *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/eu-china_2020_strategic_agenda_en.pdf, 9, 14.

December 30, 2020, stipulated market access and investment liberalization in China, for example for private health care.[109] Africa is a focal point for both the European Union and China. On January 1, 2021, the EU signed a partnership with the African Union on health security, for example to strengthen African capacities for disease control.[110] On April 15, 2021, the EU initiated the Cotonou Follow-up Agreement as an overarching cooperation framework with African countries.[111]

These initiatives give the European Union and European companies the potential for cooperation with China in the health sector, particularly within the framework of international mechanisms. Health security offers a neutral, and at the same time, promising framework for closer cooperation. It aligns the interests of different states and offers augmented potential for all actors. Health care is politically, economically and technologically relevant and foundational. China's will for a global commitment to health policy is undisputed. Europe could use an inclusive approach towards China for its own strategic and economic advantage as well as for the benefit of third parties, such as in Africa or in other geostrategic areas of action of the European Union.

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[109] EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, December 30, 2020, https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/december/tradoc_159242.pdf.

[110] European Commission, "European Union and African Union sign partnership to scale up preparedness for health emergencies," December 7, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/european-union-and-african-union-sign-partnership-scale-preparedness-health-emergencies_en.

[111] European Commission, "Post-Cotonou: Negotiators reach a political deal on a new EU/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Partnership Agreement," December 3, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2291.

The Strategic Narrative of Anti-Hegemonism

Doris Vogl

In China, the concept of anti-hegemonism is a largely discussed subject in the academic disciplines of international relations and security analysis. At the same time, the issue of anti-hegemonism is by no means restricted to the academic world but represents a main supporting pillar in foreign and security policy. This is well-illustrated by the latest version of China's National Defence Policy, accessible on the website of the PRC Ministry of Defence:

> Never Seeking Hegemony, Expansion or Spheres of Influence. This is the distinctive feature of China's national defence in the new era. […] History proves and will continue to prove that China will never follow the beaten track of big powers in seeking hegemony. No matter how it might develop, China will never threaten any other country or seek any sphere of influence.[1]

Apart from official documents, the narrative of anti-hegemonism regularly flows into the statements of Chinese state leadership representatives. Wei Fenghe, Minister of National Defence, referred to this narrative at the Asia Security Summit (Shangri-la Dialogue) in 2019, nearly utilizing the same wording as in the Defence Policy:

> In the future, no matter how strong it becomes, China shall never threaten anyone, seek hegemony or establish spheres of influence. History has proven and will continue to prove that China will not follow the beaten path of big powers seeking hegemony when it grows strong. Hegemony does not conform to China's values and national interests.[2]

As a side note, the exact rendering of formulas or wordings has always been characteristic of Chinese official narratives. The strategic message of a narrative is "carved in stone" on purpose and offers no room for rhetorical modification by the speaker.

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1 http://eng.mod.gov.cn/defense-policy/index.htm.

2 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "The 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Fourth Plenary Session," June 2, 2019, transcript.

Historical background

Anti-hegemonism ranks as one of the long-term strategic narratives, dating back to the early period of the People's Republic under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. The anti-hegemonic narrative is closely linked to the "Five Principles of peaceful Coexistence"[3], which are part of the principle of non-interference.

Amidst an ongoing Cold War situation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the young PR China regarded both systems as a hegemonic threat for world peace and, more importantly, for national security. Contrary to the relatively young People's Republic, both the USA and USSR were in possession of nuclear weapons and permanent seats in the UN Security Council. The vulnerability of the People's Republic was also reflected by the fact that, until November 1971, the entire PRC was represented by Taiwan within the United Nations.

After the end of the Sino-Soviet friendship in 1960 - which resulted in a geopolitical split until the late Gorbachev era - tensions over disputed border lines broke out at several locations and escalated in the battle of Zhenbao along the Ussuri river in 1968. Hence, the USSR was perceived as the primary hegemonic threat by Beijing for nearly three decades.

By the end of the 20th century, only one of the two hegemonic powers had survived, and China had to redefine its' threat scenarios. According to Chinese perception, the collapse of the Soviet Union evolved into an era of "unipolar hegemonism" of the United States, when the Washington Consensus[4] was established on a global scale. According to the Chinese point

[3] "The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" constitute the fundamental doctrine of the People's Republic foreign policy. They were proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1953 to India and Myanmar and further extended in the Ten Principles of Bandung, adopted at the 1955 Asian-African Conference. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

[4] The Washington Consensus refers to a set of mostly free-market economic ideas, supported by prominent economists and international organizations, such as IMF, World Bank, EU and US. The ten principles of the Washington Consensus, developed by the economist John Williamson in 1989, include ten sets of specific policy recommendations.

of view, the era of US unipolarism already showed major signs of decline during the global financial crisis of 2008:

> Later, the unipolar era proved to be a fleeting moment and the intense optimism prevalent mainly in the West turned out to be premature when the 2008-2009 financial crisis broke out and discredited the Washington Consensus.[5]

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, the legitimate question arises whether China itself has stepped into the trap of hegemonic behaviour patterns and whether that concerns the Euro-strategic area as well. This thematic field will be examined in Part III of this volume, following the regional and country analysis of Part II.

Present-day relevance of the anti-hegemonic narrative

In the current daily diplomatic conduct of the People's Republic the anti-hegemonic narrative is still omnipresent in the public statements of government representatives. On the side-lines of the National People's Congress of March 2021, Foreign Minister Wang Yi even draws a direct line between the question of systemic rivalry and the perceived hegemonic aspirations of Western great powers:

> Choice of system should be made in a tailor-made way, rather than through trimming the feet to fit in the shoes. Whether a path works for a country depends on how it fits the country's conditions. To smear or attack others for their different system or even claim superiority is in essence "hegemony of system."[6]

Apart from the diplomatic level, the reproach of Western hegemonic ambitions is also to be found in the current Chinese academic discourse on economic issues. This is especially emphasized with regard to development theory and development policy. Tang Xiaoyang from the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University considers the imposition of

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[5] Jiemian Yang (2020), "Major Power Relations in a Post-Pandemic World Order," in *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* (2020/1), 5.

[6] MFA, Press conference of March 7, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1859138.shtml.

socio-political reform on developing countries as the wrong path and underlines China's anti-hegemonic attitude. The aspect of democratization is not mentioned in Tang's critique:

> The Washington Consensus assigned developing countries with restructuring of their socio-political systems. However, the diverse and complex socio-political conditions particular to each country, renders implementation of all the given prescriptions nearly impossible. China was able to develop by promoting market economy and international trade while maintaining a socio-political system different from the West. China's own development and its active commercial engagements with other developing countries prove that market-oriented activities can flourish without following the Washington model.[7]

Besides declaring existing Western development models – like the Washington Consensus – as non-functional and obsolete, Beijing's anti-hegemonic narrative also fulfils an essential future-oriented function. In several aspects, it perfectly consolidates the argumentative basis for the widely propagated global visions of a "new global order" and a "community with a shared future for mankind". At this point, the narrative of moral reasoning turns back to the argumentation that the developing world is suffering from the injustices and inadequacies of the old world order. Despite clear signs of erosion and decline, the old Western world order is still in place and hinders the development potential of the global South, according to China's interpretation:

> The grand debate around the new world order should be solution oriented with the ultimate goal of building a better future. This is particularly relevant for the vast developing world as they are presented a historic opportunity to correct the injustices cumulatively imposed on them by the old world orders and to earn their long-due rights and interests in the future.[8]

The underlying message is clear: A new world order is supposed to prioritize the interests of the developing countries, whereas the industrialized world and mid-level power players, will have to pay their long-outstanding share to the global south.

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[7] Tang Xiaoyang (2020), "Co-evolutionary Pragmatism: Re-examine 'China Model' and Its Impact on Developing Countries," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29: 126, 858.

[8] Jiemian Yang (2020), "The Theory and Policies of Mutual Benefit and Win-Win Strategy," 14.

The US researcher Deborah Larson strongly emphasizes the fact that China does not offer a particular "development model" to the world but rather aims at preparing the field for development in global and regional organizations. According to Larson, this kind of wide approach towards the issue of global development creates a significant strategic advantage for China. In stark contrast to the logic of this analysis, the official Chinese narrative will always remain focused on the ideological aspect. Following the ideological framework of the People's Republic, the anti-hegemonic orientation simply does not allow the development of a "model".

China's Narratives in the Context of Hybrid Threats[1]

Anton Dengg

DeymosHR/Shutterstock.com

China and hybrid threats are currently in the focus of security policy. Various accusations that China is using soft as well as hard power for power projection purposes are being made by politicians and in the media. Technology plays a decisive role in this. The technological changes of recent years have had an impact on the global economy and security. For example, the EU is economically closely intertwined with China. "The exchange of goods and services between the EU and the People's Republic of China amounts to almost 1.5 billion euros per day."[2] The contrasting narratives of China and its trading partners sometimes create significant tensions in terms of security policy.

[1] The present text was finalized at the end of June 2021.

[2] All quotations in German were translated by the AAF Language Institute. The original quotation reads: "Der Austausch von Waren und Dienstleistungen zwischen der EU und der Volksrepublik China beläuft sich pro Tag auf knapp eineinhalb Milliarden Euro." *Die Presse*, "EU und China handelseins" (ag./la); *Die Presse*, December 31, 2020, 2.

"Despite its breath-taking developments in the last twenty years, China has not yet emerged as a great power with the necessary capacity and quality to be able to influence economic, political, social, and military developments worldwide,"[3] Xuewu Gu, Acting Chair in the Department of Political Science at the University of Trier, concluded in 1999. In view of the discussion on hybrid threats that emerged about ten years later and has continued to this day, it is interesting to note that Dr. Gu concluded, "Last but not least, China still lacks cultural attractiveness, i.e. soft power, the ability to influence other states according to its own will, without having to resort to pressure or force."[4] More than 20 years later, this view of security policy is likely to meet with divergent reactions.

The concept of hybrid threat, i.e. influencing states with different means and methods, tactics and strategies, is not new. Even the use of "directed" information processing as well as economic coercion have been known as means to achieve strategic goals at least since the Cold War era. Even the use of task forces to support or overthrow regimes is not new. However, an intensive, open discussion on possible forms of state aggression in this regard has only been discernible for about ten years. New technologies and their dynamics, such as cyber means, or current forms of communication, such as social media, have – in terms of dissemination and time – brought a further momentum to power-political game variants. Aggression can take place under the form of covert action or as political, economic, socio-political or even technological activities in legally grey areas. Even reinterpretations of state efforts to protect human rights as well as maintain sovereignty can be turned into the opposite by corresponding discrediting approaches. Almost any positive action by an actor can be reinterpreted by using fake news or by calling it a "conspiracy theory," thus influencing a government's policies. Different narratives could be used to justify hybrid

[3] The original quotation reads: "China ist trotz seiner atemberaubenden Entwicklungen in den letzten zwanzig Jahren noch nicht zu einer Großmacht aufgestiegen, die über die notwendige Kapazität und Qualität verfügt, wirtschaftliche, politische, gesellschaftliche und militärische Entwicklungen weltweit beeinflussen zu können." Xuewu Gu, "Chinas Aufstieg zur Weltmacht?", in *Jahrbuch für internationale Sicherheitspolitik* 1999, ed. Erich Reiter (Hamburg Berlin Bonn, Mittler & Sohn GmbH, 1999), 631-46, 645.

[4] Ibid, 646. The original quotation reads: "*Last but not least* fehlt China noch die kulturelle Attraktivität, also die soft power, die Fähigkeit, andere Staaten nach dem eigenen Willen zu beeinflussen, ohne auf Druck, bzw. Gewalt zurückgreifen zu müssen."

actions. Various Western states accuse China of being a hybrid actor that uses its own means of power to influence the EU.

China as a perceived hybrid power factor

In recent years, accusations have been mounting in the Western world that China's aggressive policies pose an increasing threat. Countless examples bear witness to this. As early as in 1994, the daily newspaper *taz* described China as a new adversary of the USA. Telephone interviews conducted in 2019 showed that 41% of those questioned named China as the region from which, in their view, a particularly high threat potential emanated in terms of industrial espionage and data theft. In second place of this survey came Russia with 31%, followed by the USA with 14%. Moreover, the fact that in the ranking of the 15 countries with the highest military expenditure worldwide China (252 billion USD) comes already second[5] behind the USA (778 billion USD)[6] is also regarded as a threat. Even though the USA invests most in its military budget, China has the world's largest army in terms of soldiers (2.2 million).[7]

Furthermore, particularly major cyberattacks on Western institutions have repeatedly been attributed to Chinese hackers. The *New York Times*, for example, blames the blackout in the Indian megacity of Mumbai in October 2020 on a Chinese cyberattack.

Clive Hamilton, professor of public ethics at the University of Canberra, writes in his book[8] about a secretive military use of several islands in the South China Sea. This would amount to both soft and hard power projection.

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[5] Diego Lopes da Silva, Nan Tian and Alexandra Marksteiner: "Trends in World Military Expenditure", 2020, *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, April 2021, https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/fs_2104_milex_0.pdf.

[6] According to Statista: source SIPRI. All figures are estimations. Expenditure values have been converted to US dollars based on current prices and exchange rates.

[7] Statista Research Department, "Ranking der 15 Länder mit den weltweit höchsten Militärausgaben im Jahr 2020", survey period 2020, published by *Statista Research Department*, May 26, 2021, https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/157935/umfrage/laender-mit-den-hoechsten-militaerausgaben/.

[8] Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, "Die lautlose Eroberung: Wie China westliche Demokratien unterwandert und die Welt neue ordnet", *Deutsche Verlagsanstalt*, München, 2020, Kindle version.

The European narrative of hybrid threats

But what is the EU's narrative on hybrid actions? Is it comparable to that of China? What is the Chinese narrative on soft power projection? A closer look at the similarities and contrasts in this regard will therefore be taken at the outset. To understand China and its strategy, it is sometimes necessary to use Chinese glasses.

First, there is no more a global definition of hybrid threats than there is of terrorism. Experts in the EU member states define this term in differing ways, even if the EU is aiming at a uniform understanding. The European Commission describes a hybrid threat as the concept of a mixture "[…] of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare."[9] Hybrid threats are of essential importance with regard to "[…] national security and defence and the maintenance of law and order […]."[10]

China considers the concept of hybrid warfare to be of Western origin and, therefore, to follow Western narratives. Although this discourse is pursued by China, it should be countered "[…] without using the corresponding internationally common key terms,"[11] whereby the overriding strategic objective is to weave Chinese narratives into global discourses.

In this context, a possible Chinese narrative for "good" governance is outlined at first. In order to transform a country, the size of China, it has "[…] to follow certain ideas, some of which may have implications far

[9] European Commission, "Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats – a European Union response," Brussels, April 6, 2016, JOIN (2016) 18 final, 2, http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/16201.

[10] Ibid.

[11] The original quotation reads: "ohne die entsprechenden international gängigen Schlüsselbegriffe anzuwenden", Doris Vogl, "Volksrepublik China. Zivilisationsanspruch und Wahrnehmung hybrider Bedrohungen," in *Wissenschaft & Frieden 2019-3: Hybrider Krieg?*, 20-22, https://www.wissenschaft-und-frieden.de/seite.php?artikelID=2381.

beyond China's borders."[12] Therefore, the following concepts should be applied:

- Shishi Qiushi (Seeking Truth from Facts): This emphasises, in particular, China's emergence by peaceful means, without war.
- Minsheng weida (Primacy of People's Livelihood): The livelihood of the people is the cornerstone of a state.
- Zhengti siwei (Holistic Thinking): Holistic thinking is perceived as important. The whole is seen as greater than the combination of its parts.
- Zhengfu shi biyaodeshan (Government as a Necessary Virtue): China relies on the advantages of a strong state. Only such a state forms a protective shield for the economy and, thus, for society.
- Liangzheng shanzhi (Good Governance): The ultimate test of a "good" political system is the extent to which it can provide governance.
- Minxin xiangbei and xuanxian renneng (Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People and Meritocracy): It discusses the Chinese idea of political governance. Only when rulers work diligently, can they be assured to win the hearts of the people.
- Jianshou bingxu (Selective Learning and Adaptation): Learning from others is highly valued.
- Hexie zhongdao (Harmony and Moderation): This is attributed to Chinese culture: as the latter is strengthened by Confucianism, the value of harmony prevails over confrontation.

The basic idea of the above-mentioned concepts applies to internal governance but could just as successfully be applied externally. Thus, these ideas imply the hybrid strategies of a Western understanding, especially with regard to "soft power."

[12] Zhang Weiwei, "The China Wave. Rise of a Civilizational State", Published by World Century Publishing Corporation, originally published in Chinese 2011, 125, https://is.cuni.cz/studium/predmety/index.php?do=download&did=130405&kod=JPM902.

Conflict between technology and critical infrastructure

In its "Elements for a new EU strategy on China," the European Commission states that "Ambitious initiatives such as 'Made-in-China 2025' and the related 'Internet +' action plan underline the importance that China attaches to the digital economy as well as its transformative potential for sectors such as manufacturing."[13] From this understanding, the EU recognises that it benefits "[…] from strengthening **research and innovation** cooperation with China by jointly developing knowledge and technology, tapping into China's talent pool […]."[14]

The USA rates China highly as a technological power, which is reflected in recent statements by the Biden administration. This goes hand in hand with President Biden's political demand that the USA must, "[…] take back the leading position from China [note: in the electric mobility sector]."[15] With regard to electric mobility, the US president states, "They [note: China] are not going to win this race. We can't let them do that."[16] According to the online technology magazine Golem, President Biden is convinced that 80 per cent of the production capacity for batteries for electric vehicles is located in China and "[…] Chinese companies are also targeting the USA."[17] China's global expansion initiatives also hit Europe. For example, already in 2019, the magazine *Der Spiegel* reported on the Chinese corporation CATL wanting to build the largest factory for e-car batteries in Europe in Germany, which the German Federal Minister of Research described as "[…]

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[13] European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Elements for a new EU strategy on China," Brussels, June 22, 2016, JOIN (2016) 30 final, 9, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/joint_communication_to_the_european_parliament_and_the_council_-_elements_for_a_new_eu_strategy_on_china.pdf.

[14] Ibid.

[15] The original quotation reads: "China die Spitzenposition [Anm.: in der Industriesparte der Elektromobilität] wieder abnehmen." Golem.de, "Die elektrische Zukunft soll den USA gehören, nicht China," https://www.golem.de/news/joe-biden-die-zukunft-des-autos-ist-elektrisch-2105-156600.html, May 19, 2021, dpa/Werner Pluta.

[16] Ibid. The original quotation reads: "80 Prozent der Produktionskapazitäten bei Akkus für Elektrofahrzeuge lägen in China."

[17] Ibid. The original quotation reads: "[…] chinesische Unternehmen hätten auch den US-Markt im Visier."

existential issue […]."[18] The consulting firm Benchmark Mineral Intelligence reports that 46 of the 70 or so gigafactories under construction worldwide are in China.[19]

China is even active in infrastructure projects, such as a bridge construction project in Croatia, or with investments in Portugal's electricity supply.[20] "That's how it works all over Europe. Railway lines, ports and power grids, mechanical engineering, tourism and finance – Chinese companies are buying into the European economy in all these sectors. They have already invested far more than 300 billion euros here."[21] In 2016, the "[…] Chinese household appliance group Midea bought the German robotics manufacturer Kuka for 4.6 billion euros."[22] The narrative of an increasingly Chinese threat has clearly taken root.

The statement in the *Economist* about how China's "[…] huge investments abroad give it a sharp power" which it uses to "[…] silence critics […]."[23] The *Tagesspiegel* quotes a leading functionary of the EU industry lobby, according to which "The Chinese state-owned companies have unlimited financial power with the state treasury behind them, this is not fair competition."[24] Furthermore, the German industry association BDI warned that the "Chinese economic model had a strong state influence."[25] Thus, the

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[18] The original quotation reads: "existenzielles Thema," Alexander Jung, "Akkus für Millionen," *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 8/February 16, 2019, 55.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Schmidt, "Wie gefährlich China für Europa wirklich ist," *Tagesspiegel*, September 15, 2019, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/investor-partner-konkurrent-wie-gefaehrlich-china-fuer-europa-wirklich-ist/25014924.html.

[21] Ibid. The original quotation reads: "So läuft das europaweit. Eisenbahnlinien, Häfen und Stromnetze, Maschinenbau, Tourismus und Finanzwesen – in all diesen Branchen kaufen sich chinesische Unternehmen in die europäische Wirtschaft ein. Schon weit mehr als 300 Milliarden Euro haben sie hier investiert."

[22] Ibid. The original quotation reads: "[…] als der chinesische Hausgerätekonzern Midea für 4,6 Milliarden Euro den deutschen Robotik-Hersteller Kuka kaufte."

[23] The original quotation reads: "riesige Investitionen im Ausland verschaffen ihm eine scharfe Macht, die es nutze, um Kritiker mundtot zu machen," *Economist*, cited in Schmidt, "Wie gefährlich China für Europa wirklich ist."

[24] The original quotation reads: "Die chinesischen Staatskonzerne verfügen mit der Staatskasse im Rücken über eine unbegrenzte Finanzkraft, das ist kein fairer Wettbewerb," Schmidt, "Wie gefährlich China für Europa wirklich ist."

[25] Ibid.

EU perceives hybrid threats from China primarily in the economic sphere, especially in the area of investment. The European response was the decision to adopt the "Regulation Establishing Framework for the Screening of FDI into the Union"[26] (March 19, 2019), a complement to Brussels' China strategy[27] (March 12, 2019). Since then, the EU's priority demand to Chinese negotiating partners has been transparency and reciprocity.

The importance of space research and technology for environmental and climate problems and their solutions can be seen in solar cell technology. The latter promises to make a significant contribution in fighting the climate crisis. Solar cells are an essential component of satellites and spaceships, and China has global leadership in this sector. Chinese space research could help this technology to take a further leap forward in terms of efficiency, product weight and cost minimisation.[28]

High-tech products not only reinforce strategic power projections internationally but also national resilience against external hybrid threats. Technologies in key industries, such as cloud computing and big data increase the vulnerability of our society to hybrid threats.[29] From China's perspective, the "next-generation information technologies" will be the Internet of Things, cloud computing and big data.[30] The industries of the future are also predicted to be "[…] micro-system, nanotechnology, advanced manufacturing, human-computer interaction […]."[31]

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[26] Official Journal of the European Union, March 21, 2019, L 79 I/1, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0452&from=EN.

[27] European Commission, "EU-China – A strategic outlook," in *European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council*, March 12, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf.

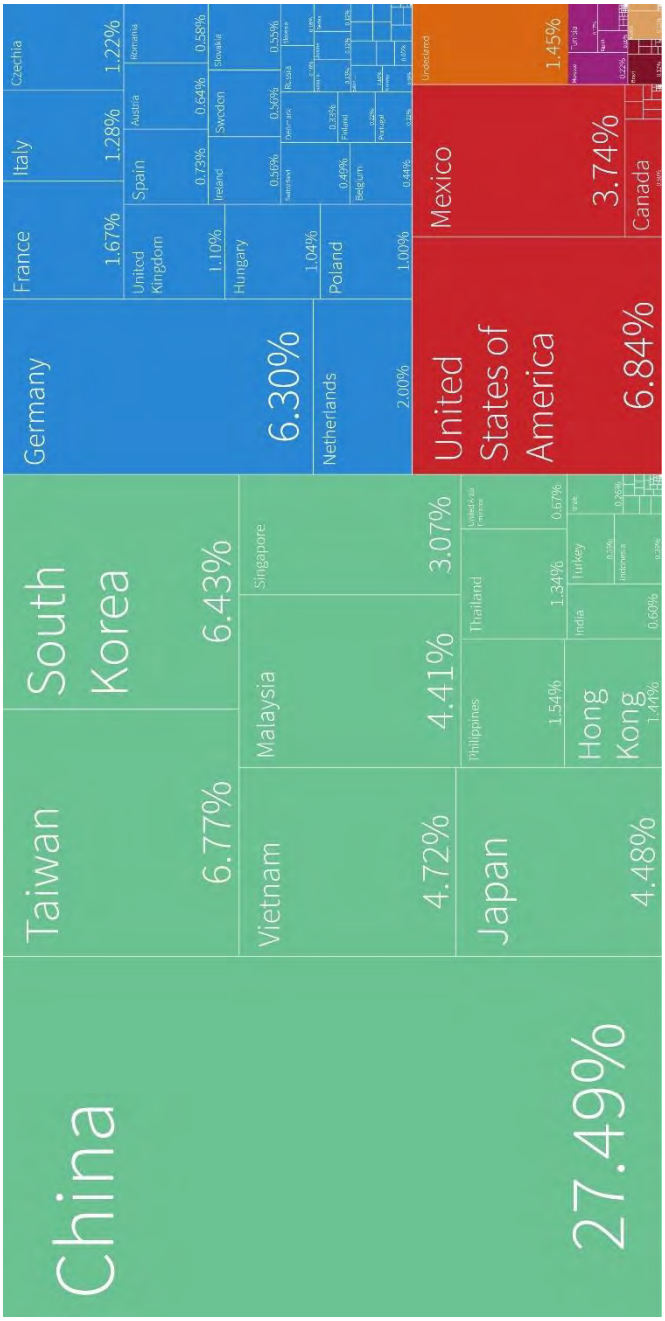
[28] TNW, "Why we need to colonize Mars as soon as possible," https://thenextweb.com/news/why-we-need-to-build-colonies-mars-now-syndication, published May 10, 2021, originally published by James Maynard, *The Cosmic Companion*.

[29] European Commission, "Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats," 11.

[30] Gu, "Chinas Aufstieg zur Weltmacht?"

[31] Ibid.

Who exported Electronics in 2019?



The Growth Lab at Harvard University. The Atlas of Economic Complexity. http://www.atlas.cid.harvard.edu

China's technological market power is evident from export data, especially with regard to electronics. A slightly outdated but nicely structured table from 2019 shows that China has a share of 27.49 per cent in global electronics exports. The superiority becomes clear from a comparison to runner-up Taiwan, with a share of 6.77 per cent. The entire Asian region exported over 64 per cent of all electronics.[32]

Export figures are not the only evidence of China's geopolitical claim to leadership. Other indicators of the market power ambition are patent applications. Data from the European Patent Office from 2019 illustrate the Chinese push. For example, with "[…] 3,524 […] patents the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei […] applied for more patents than any other company in Europe […]."[33] Market power can also be gained through standards and "China is consistently working to enforce its own technological standards, thus determining future framework conditions for international companies."[34]

Outer Space Initiatives

According to an EU document, China "[…] is seeking a bigger role and exerting greater influence on an evolving system of global governance."[35] Outer Space is not exempt from this as it is becoming increasingly important in terms of security policy. Not only because of the solar technology mentioned above. The question of defence capabilities is increasingly coming to the fore in the area of Outer Space. "Defence capabilities need to be strengthened in order to enhance the EU's resilience to hybrid threats. It is important to identify key capability areas, e.g. surveillance and

[32] Due to the COVID-19 situation, comparative presentations of more recent export data are deliberately dispensed with.

[33] The original quotation reads: "mehr Patente angemeldet als jedes andere Unternehmen in Europa […] 3524," Stephan Scheuer, *Der Masterplan. Chinas Weg zur Hightech Weltherrschaft*, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2018, Erweiterte und aktualisierte Taschenbuchausgabe 2021, Kindle Version, 10.

[34] The original quotation reads: "China arbeitet konsequent daran, eigene technologische Standards durchzusetzen und bestimmt so künftige Rahmenbedingungen für internationale Unternehmen MERICS (Mercator Institute for Chinas Studies), "Chinas digitaler Aufstieg", April 8, 2019, short version, https://merics.org/de/studie/chinas-digitaler-aufstieg.

[35] European Commission, "Joint Communication," 2.

reconnaissance capabilities."[36] Above all, "[…] Public-Private Partnership and accompanying measures will primarily focus on civilian products and services, the outcome of these initiatives should allow technology users to be better protected also against hybrid threats."[37]

Current Chinese space successes show China's technical capability and great power ambition. In particular, the progress in Outer Space in 2021, the successful landing of the rover Zhurong on Mars (May 2021), and the positioning of the main module of the Chinese space station Tiangong in LEO[38] (April 2021), testify to the country's ambitions and self-image of wanting to take a leading role in space travel. China's efforts in the field of space exploration are manifold.

As early as in 2018, the Chinese National Defence University of the People's Liberation Army provided insights into a "Space Situational Assessment and Space Governance"[39] in an essay titled "International Strategic Relations and China's National Security." "At present, space development is viewed as a top strategic priority by major powers in the world."[40] Guoying Chen thus points to the strategic importance and future political influence of space technologies. The USA, Russia, Europe (especially France, Italy, and the United Kingdom), Canada, Japan, South Korea, and India are particularly committed. Chen draws on investment data from the Space Foundation and its 2016 Space Report. The implicit logic is that China's space ambitions are merely a catch-up process and, therefore, justified. China sees itself as a "rising star"[41] in space exploration. The increased importance of Outer Space research is reflected in investments. For example, the "Space Foundation" states that "the global space economy grew in 2019 to $423.8 billion […],"[42]

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[36] Ibid., 9.

[37] Ibid., 11.

[38] Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

[39] Institute for Strategic Studies, National Defence University of Peoples' Liberation Army, China, *International Strategic Relation and China's National Security*, Vol. 3, Chen Guoying, "Space Situational Assessment and Space Governance," World Scientific, Singapore, 2018, 291-312.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Space Foundation, Global Space, https://www.spacefoundation.org/2020/07/30/global-space-economy-grows-in-2019-to-423-8-billion-the-space-report-2020-q2-analysis-shows/.

increasing by more than "[…] $9 billion over the previous year […]."[43] In terms of emphasis, the following research fields emerge: launch vehicles, communication and earth observation satellites, development of new rocket propulsion systems. The Chinese study also predicts an enormous surge in the development of small satellites (so-called smallsats).[44]

China's increasing focus on the narrative of a great space nation becomes obvious through various activities. For example, Beijing is committed to a "Regional Centre for Space Science and Technology Education, affiliated with the United Nations and hosted at existing research and higher education institutions around the world."[45] This makes China a supporter of space education and training, alongside India, Jordan, Mexico/Brazil, Morocco and Nigeria. The goals of the centre are "[…] to develop the skills and knowledge of university educators, scientists and government officials through rigorous theory, research, applications, field exercises, and pilot projects regarding aspects of space science and technology that can contribute to sustainable development."[46] According to the UN report, Beijing maintains the Regional Centre for Space Science Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (RCSSTEAP) with three master's programmes. Focal points are Satellite Communication and GNSS, Remote Sensing and Geo-Information Systems, and Micro-satellite Technology. The latter, in particular, reveals an interest in the development of micro-satellites. A doctoral programme for Space Technology Applications completes the university programme. Furthermore, UNOOSA, and CNSA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to expand cooperation with the international community, for mutual access to research data from China's lunar and space research to promote technological opportunities and scientific progress. This is in line with UNOOSA's guiding principle of making all the benefits of space exploration available to all humankind. Increased competition with other space research nations for the best minds and ideas has opened up.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Institute for Strategic Studies, *International Strategic Relation*.

[45] UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), Annual Report 2019, Vienna, 2020, 49, https://www.unoosa.org/res/oosadoc/data/documents/2020/stspace/stspace77_0_html/UNOOSA_Annual_Report_2019.pdf.

[46] Ibid.

On the legislative level, differences between the USA and China are particularly evident in the interpretation of the UN General Assembly's Outer Space Treaty 222 (XXI), the article on "[…] peaceful exploration and use of Outer Space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, and the importance of developing the rule of law in this new area of human endeavour […]."[47] China's criticism refers primarily to the US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (HR 2262), which was confirmed by the US Senate in 2015. This law aims to "[…] facilitate a pro-growth environment for the developing commercial space industry by encouraging private sector investment […]."[48] The Act provides that "[…] [a]ny asteroid resource or space resource obtained, including to possess, own, transport, use, and sell the asteroid or space resource obtained in accordance with applicable law, including the international obligations."[49] What is special about this is that the "[…] language that defines property rights is designed to get around the provision of the […][50] Outer Space Treaty, including the moon, and is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means."[51] This would legalise the mining of ores on the moon, asteroids or planets, at least from the US point of view, which for China would violate UN provisions on the use of Outer Space. China therefore protested, underlining once again its narrative of a responsible great power. However, China's goal to establish a permanent manned station on the South Pole of the moon by 2029 and becoming the leading space nation should not be forgotten.[52] It would give China control

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47 UNOOSA, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 2222 (XXI). "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies," https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/outerspacetreaty.html.

48 Kasey Tuttle, *JURIST, legal News & Commentary*, "Senate approves Bill to legalize Space mining," November 13, 2015, https://www.jurist.org/news/2015/11/senate-approves-bill-to-legalize-space-mining/.

49 H.R.2262 - U.S. Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act, PUBLIC LAW 114–90—November 25, 2015, § 51303. "Asteroid resource and space resource rights," 129 STAT. 721, https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ90/PLAW-114publ90.pdf.

50 Tuttle, "Senate approves Bill."

51 UNOOSA, "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States."

52 Robert Klatt, Forschung und Wissen, "China plant Eröffnung einer bemannten Station auf dem Mond," https://www.forschung-und-wissen.de/nachrichten/astronomie/china-plant-eroeffnung-einer-bemannten-station-auf-dem-mond-13372894.

of a small territory on the Earth's natural satellite, although possession is prohibited under the UN Moon Treaty. Only partner nations could participate.

A geopolitical competition for partners for space research has begun and manifested itself in the form of various agreements and alliances.

Already in 2017, Roscosmos and CNSA signed a joint space programme for the period 2018-2022. The six-chapter programme includes "[…] the study of the Moon and deep space, space research and related technologies, satellites and their use, the components base and materials, cooperation in the data of Earth's remote sensing and other issues."[53] On April 9, 2021, the cooperation agreement was extended by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the construction of an International Scientific Lunar Station (ISLS). "Outer Space is an important dimension of the relationships of comprehensive mutually advantageous cooperation between Russia and China where significant progress has been achieved in recent years,"[54] said the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin in a press conference on April 27, 2021.

To underline the inclusive nature of bilateral space ambitions, the prospect of a "[…] roadmap for building the moon station, work closely in planning, design, implementing and operations of the station, which also includes promoting the project to the international aerospace community"[55] were envisioned.

The USA already signed the Artemis Accords with eight states in November 2020,[56] thus forming a geopolitical alliance of interests. The aim is to agree on "[…] principles governing norms of behaviour for those who want to

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[53] TASS, Russian News Agency, https://tass.com/science/1283825, see also Deng Xiaoci, "China, Russia emphasize international cooperation in establishing lunar station with joint declaration," April 24, 2021, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221931.shtml.

[54] TASS, Russian News Agency.

[55] Deng Xiaoci, "China, Russia ink MOU on building international scientific research station on moon: CNSA," March 9, 2021, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202103/1217875.shtml.

[56] Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the UAE and Great Britain.

participate in the Artemis lunar exploration program."[57] Russia – unlike China – was invited to participate, but Dmitry Rogozin described the programme as too "U.S.-centric."[58] This makes it evident that those who have dominance in the respective space programme also defend their own interests against partners. This would confirm the strategic importance of such concepts.

Thus, the aforementioned cooperations do not only reveal the openly fought competition for cooperation partners, but also the formation of two pragmatic strategic space research alliances/blocs with, for the time being, Russia and China on the one hand, and the USA with Western partners, including Australia and Japan, on the other hand. If Europe wants to continue to play a role in space research and participate in the boom of space technology research, the following alternatives arise:

- It joins one of the blocs.
- It finds a diplomatic solution to cooperate with both research blocs.
- It finds its own alternative to the competing blocs, which will hardly be financially feasible.

The formation of an alliance is particularly controversial because after 20 years, the guarantee of existence of the International Space Station (ISS) expires in 2024, an urgent replacement is imminent, and no Western-style alternative is available in the medium term. The head of the Russian space agency, Dmitry Rogozin, admitted on a radio station that it should be started as soon as possible.[59] The possibility of space tourism should be considered, he said.

With its current unmanned space station Tiangong 2, which is modelled on the ISS, China has come very close to this goal and Rogozin's ideas. China would then be the only space-faring nation with a manned station in orbit. China's underlying motivation is manifold: "[…] to conduct scientific

[57] Jeff Foust, "Eight countries sign Artemis Accords," SpaceNews, October 13, 2020, https://spacenews.com/eight-countries-sign-artemis-accords/.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Wiener Zeitung, "Russland erwägt Bau einer neuen Weltraumstation," May 25, 2020, https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/wissen/technologie/2061743-Russland-erwaegt-Bau-einer-neuen-Weltraumstation.html.

research and make medical, environmental, and technological discoveries" but also, e.g., "[…] commercial gains and prestige."[60]

China is making an important contribution by providing generous financial support[61] (alongside Germany) to the UN-SPIDER programme,[62] within the framework of UNOOSA (UN Office for Outer Space Affairs). This will enable nations to use "[…] space data and technologies, such as satellite imagery, to prevent and manage disasters."[63] Thus, the potential international cooperation area of Outer Space will make a significant contribution to conflict management. This will affect all those states that participate in peacekeeping missions worldwide – such as China or also Austria. In general, this underlines China's narrative as a responsible great power.

UNOOSA and the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) called for a competition in which the winners would be given the opportunity to conduct experiments for research purposes on the China Space Station (CSS), which will be operational in 2022. Nine winning teams were selected from within 42 applicants from 27 countries. The teams are made up of participants from 17 countries, including European countries.[64] The submitted projects were carefully evaluated by 60 experts from UNOOSA, CMSA, and the international space community. What remained were the most interesting and promising ones from the disciplines "[…] space medicine, space life science, biotechnology, microgravity fluid physics, microgravity combustion, astronomy, and space technologies."[65]

It is not to be expected that the "Middle Kingdom" will leave the above-mentioned research fields only to other states. In accordance with the goals of the 14th Five-Year Plan, it will vehemently push research as well as education and training. The Chinese position paper for a United Nations

[60] TNW, "China may gain a monopoly on space stations – but that doesn't have to be bad news," published May 18, 2021, https://thenextweb.com/news/china-tiangong-may-gain-a-monopoly-on-space-stations-syndication
[61] UNOOSA, Annual Report 2019.
[62] UN-SPIDER is a United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER).
[63] UNOOSA, Annual Report 2019.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

General Assembly is worth noting. In it, China emphasises its peaceful approach to Outer Space, especially the prevention of an arms race. China is convinced that it "[…] has played an active part in the work of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. It advocates fair and equitable rules governing Outer Space to realise the vision of a community with a shared future in the peaceful exploration and use of Outer Space,"[66] thus revealing China's moral narrative.

The exploration of deeper space is generally expected to provide a new impetus for various space technologies. The primary goal remains the manned flight to Moon and Mars.

Financing space ambitions

Space tourism is predicted to make a considerable breakthrough. Now that a flight including a stay on the ISS is already possible for a small number of interested parties (at a cost of about USD 50 million[67]), this will be made possible in future for a somewhat broader mass of wealthy investors in coordinated phases. Initially, a kind of space glider will take passengers to an altitude of 100-130 km, allow two to four minutes of weightlessness, and then return to Earth. The company "China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT)" develops such spacecraft. "CALT is Chinese state-owned but operated by contract companies and has about 27,000 employees in several research labs."[68] Western competition in this field comes from companies owned by Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson.[69]

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[66] People's Republic of China, "China and the United Nations," Position Paper of the People's Republic of China, For the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, translation, 1-10.

[67] Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), "Die Eroberung des Alls läuft auf Hochtouren," updated December 29, 2020, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/digitec/raumfahrt-missionen-die-ganze-welt-will-ins-all-17122540.html.

[68] The original quotation reads: "CALT ist in chinesischem Staatseigentum, wird aber durch Vertragsfirmen betrieben und hat rund 27.000 Angestellte in etlichen Forschungslaboren," Ingenieur.de, "China plant weltgrößtes Raumschiff für 20 Weltraumtouristen," October 10, 2016, https://www.ingenieur.de/technik/fachbereiche/raumfahrt/china-plant-weltgroesstes-raumschiff-fuer-20-weltraumtouristen/.

[69] Ingenieur.de, "China plant weltgrößtes Raumschiff."

In a further stage of development, it will be possible to orbit the earth for several days in a spaceship. Billionaire Jared Isaacman "[…] has bought a rocket ride to orbit from SpaceX."[70] Three selected people will accompany him.

The next step in space tourism is a trip to the ISS, which is currently being planned. A private company offers space flights. "Axiom serves to expand access to Earth's orbit to more governments, to private individuals, and to a diverse collection of researchers, product developers, and companies."[71] The trip will cost each of the four passengers $55 million, the costs for the fourth traveller, a former Israeli fighter pilot, being borne by Israel. "The tourist flights at the Axiom company are already well booked for years […]," with the company wanting to "[…] attach three of its own modules to the American part of the space station"[72] in the future. This venture could fail when the ISS ends its life cycle in 2024. It is doubtful whether a private company will dock cost-intensive modules to the ISS for only about two to three years. The Chinese space station could possibly use this business model. Russia has already used Soyuz rockets to bring "space tourists" to the ISS, which represented "[…] an important source of income."[73] A similar motive for approximately covering the costs of space ambitions is likely to prevail with regard to future missions. The visionary Elon Musk is setting further goals and would like to use his "Starship" spacecraft, which is currently being tested, for the first private moon mission. At least one interested party has already been found.[74]

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[70] Kenneth Chang, "A Billionaire Names His Team to Ride SpaceX, No Pros Allowed," *New York Times*, published March 30, 2021, updated May 2, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/science/30spacex-inspiration4.html.

[71] Axiom Space, "What are the limits of innovation and exploration?", https://www.axiomspace.com/human-spaceflight.

[72] The original quotation reads: "Die touristischen Flüge beim Unternehmen Axiom sind bereits auf Jahre gut ausgebucht," wobei die Firma künftig "drei eigene Module am amerikanischen Teil der Raumstation anbringen will," Christoph Seidler, "Luxushotel im Erdorbit", *Der Spiegel*, 17/2021, April 24, 2021, 98.

[73] Ibid., The original quotation reads: "eine wichtige Einnahmequelle" Christoph Seidler, "Luxushotel im Erdorbit".

[74] SpaceX, Starship, https://www.spacex.com/vehicles/starship/.

The competition for financially strong passengers is open. Whoever opens up the market first and best will find it easier to finance their space ambitions. However, with new sources of income to finance space travel, questions also arise about the newly opened-up spaces.

Military use of space

In addition to commercial uses of space, military uses of space are increasingly taking shape. For example, the space tourism described above opens up further challenges, some of which are not without their own concerns. The larger such space stations are, the more legal questions inevitably arise. Who has sovereign rights in and around this "real estate?" Similar questions will arise for inhabited space stations or prospecting areas on the moon. A frictionless coexistence is hardly to be expected in the long run, especially when it comes to economic advantages in the possible mining of ores/minerals.

The creation of space forces reveals the challenges for security policy. For although "[…] space started off as a strategic domain, today it is very much used for an operational and tactical advantage on the battlefield."[75]

In 2019, the USA officially established its sixth military branch, the Space Force. President Trump announced in his speech at the time that space was "[…] the world's newest war-fighting domain" and spoke of "[…] grave threats to our national security," stating that "American superiority in space is absolutely vital […]" to the USA.[76] This military branch is intended to counter possible "threats to the USA in space and from space, such as hostile attacks on US satellites."[77] Although the budget for this is small, at $40 million, it should not be forgotten that the Pentagon funds space research to

[75] Dr. Kestutis Paulauskas, "Space: NATO's latest frontier," *NATO Review*, March 13, 2020, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/03/13/space-natos-latest-frontier/index.html.

[76] BBC News, "Space Force: Trump officially launches new US military service," December 21, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50876429.

[77] The original quotation reads: "Bedrohungen für die USA im All und aus dem All abwenden, etwa feindliche Angriffe auf US-Satelliten," Alwin Schröder, "China wirft Trump 'Wettrüsten im Weltraum' vor," *Spiegel Online*, December 23, 2019.

the tune of $14 billion a year.[78] The USA assumes that China and Russia would develop technologies to destroy US satellites.[79] These technologies have already been developed; the Pentagon expects that in the event of a conflict, China will first cripple the GPS system.

This is particularly noteworthy as exciting technologies are emerging in the rapid development of satellites for armed forces in the areas of "[…] reconnaissance, early warning, communications, and navigation […]."[80] Two US experts estimate that in the future "an opening act in a war between China and the United States for control over the Pacific would take place in space, in order to 'blind the enemy'."[81] The narrative on China has taken root in US society: "Hostility against China has been spreading in the US society in recent years."[82] Not to be forgotten should be the impact of satellite technology as an economic factor.[83]

In 2019 "French President Emmanuel Macron […] had approved the creation of French Space command within the French air force to improve the country's defence capabilities" and until 2025 it has a "[…] military spending plan that allocates 3.6 trillion ($4 billion) to defence in space."[84]

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78 Julia Stanek, "Amerikas Überlegenheit im Weltraum ist unerlässlich," *Spiegel Online*, December 21, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump-gruendet-weltraumarmee-a-1302454.html.

79 Ibid.

80 Institute for Strategic Studies, *International Strategic Relation*.

81 Paulauskas, "Space: NATO's latest frontier."

82 Global Times, "China Needs to prepare for continued US provocations: Global Times editorial," May 8, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1187788.shtml.

83 For example, the Beidou satellite positioning system is "...un indéniable instrument d'influence qui occupe une place essentielle dans la construction des routes numériques de la soie. […]. Quoi qu'il en soit, le « corridor d'information spatial des routes de la soie », ainsi dénommé par Pékin, devrait in fine accélérer la partition de la planète en deux zones d'influence, américaine et chinoise." See also English version (to be published in November 2021). P. Charon et J.-B. Jeangène Vilmer, "Les Opérations d'influence chinoises. Un moment machiavélien," (Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire) *IRSEM report*, October 2021, Paris, Ministère des Armées, p. 131, https://www.irsem.fr/rapport.html.

84 France24, "Macron announces creation of French Space force," Issued on July 13, 2019. Modified: July 14, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190713-macron-france-space-force.

Even NATO adopted a space strategy at the end of 2019. "Allied leaders welcomed the recognition of space as a new operational domain […],"[85] while preparing for future wars in space. Any conflict "[…] in space would affect all users of space – perpetrators, victims, and bystanders."[86] The dimension of Outer Space is shown by its enormous impact on many aspects of security policy. For example, NATO is "[…] increasingly reliant on space for all its missions, activities and operations: collective defence, crisis response, disaster relief and counterterrorism – all depend on information delivered from and through space."[87]

The example of satellite technology illustrates the fact that technology, space, and military are becoming more and more interconnected. The focus is not only on satellites as reconnaissance technology per se, but especially on their protection against external effects on the artificial satellites. This ranges from external interference with the components to a possible downing.

The race for critical infrastructure in space is not without consequences. At least 50 different nations or multinational organisations own and operate about 2,000 active satellites.[88] Consequently, more and more space debris from non-functional missiles poses a threat. Accordingly, there is a need for clean-up in space. But the emerging technology for space debris removal could have a dual-use character. Some kind of "satellite kidnapping" is imaginable. Cyber technology will also play a significant part in this.

In a presentation at the University of Hong Kong concerning the topic of space law Chinese lawyer and space law expert Professor Zhao Yun uses a few interesting key phrases,[89] such as "space as a final frontier," "regulate space activities," "binding regulations," "Outer Space treaty (five space treaties), deal only with the public side of space law," "no country can claim for sovereignty," "Outer Space should be preserved for peaceful purposes, no military action should be taken place in Outer Space," "no military or

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85 Paulauskas, "Space: NATO's latest frontier."
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Five Decades of Space Law: Opportunities and Challenges in the Era of Space Commercialisation. https://video.law.hku.hk/five-decades-of-space-law-opportunities-and-challenges-in-the-era-of-space-commercialization/, no time of day.

aggressiveness," "weapons are possible for not aggressive purposes," "space commercialization," "satellites for benefits," "Russia and China believe we need to think about peaceful use of Outer Space, non-peaceful use should be forbidden."[90]

Cyber activities

As Guoying Chen's security policy analysis shows, significant advances in the next generation of information technologies are expected, especially through the space domain and the development of microsatellites. Included are segments, such as "[…] micro-systems, nanotechnology, advanced manufacturing, human-computer interaction […]."[91] Cyber technology is an essential core element for achieving the goals in the above-mentioned segments. Space and cyber are closely linked, because "cyber threats can impact on each of the segments – software of the satellites, ground control, data links and the user."[92] This is precisely where one of the biggest challenges for space technologies lies. Whether China's rise, "[…] is causing some US political elites to abandon rational thinking"[93] remains to be seen. The Chinese statements in the above-mentioned position paper of the 74th General Assembly are noteworthy. Here, China emphasises its active role in UN activities such as education, research, telecommunications, and the internet.

In the future, the United Nations could contribute to easing possible emerging challenges – the UN as a superordinate authority, a hub between the countless actors. They could ensure more transparency, mutual understanding and, thus, peace.

China's narrative is that it supports "[…] a widely acceptable code of conduct in Cyberspace under the UN framework. It plays a fundamental role in meetings of the UN's Group of Governmental Experts on Cyber Security and has made important contribution to the consensus building."[94] This

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Institute for Strategic Studies, *International Strategic Relation*.
[92] Paulauskas, "Space: NATO's latest frontier."
[93] Global Times, "China needs to prepare for continued US provocations."
[94] People's Republic of China, "China and the United Nations," 1-10.

gives a clear idea of Chinese strategic thinking regarding Cyberspace. Interesting are the different narratives of China and the West. China is accused of being responsible for global cyber-attacks and cyber-espionage, while China officially emphasises its cooperative role.

The cyber sector includes other technologies, such as smartphones or infrastructure, which are indispensable for internet applications. Huawei offers the necessary 5G technology for this. The new communication technology is crucial mainly because "strategic communications are a key element to counter the components of hybrid threats in the information field."[95] For the "protection of information is an essential prerequisite to control communications."[96] This statement is particularly controversial because the German "[…] Federal Foreign Office […] according to media reports, sees evidence of cooperation between the Chinese network supplier Huawei and Chinese security authorities."[97] In its Strategic Communication Paper[98] the European Parliament mentions China as often as 66 times as an actor with a relevant power factor. On the one hand, it is seen as a potential threat due to cyber-intelligence, cybersecurity or disinformation. On the other hand, it is regarded as an important trading partner with potential. In this context, China's rise is perceived as a soft power with increased potential for influence.

The problem with cyber-weapons is that they "[…] cripple power and water supplies of entire states, our transport systems, the financial economy" and that it is "more difficult to identify a cyber-attack than to detect a ballistic

[95] European Parliament Research Service, Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA), Briefing, *STOA Options Brief*, PE 656.323, March 2021, 1-4, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/656323/EPRS_STU(2021)656323(ANN1)_EN.pdf.

[96] Ibid.

[97] The original quotation reads: "Auswärtige Amt […] Medienberichten zufolge Beweise für eine Zusammenarbeit des chinesischen Netzwerkausrüsters Huawei mit chinesischen Sicherheitsbehörden," *Zeit Online, Reuters, dpa, sr*, "Bundesregierung sollen Beweise gegen Huawei vorliegen," January 29, 2020, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-01/huawei-5g-ausbau-zusammenarbeit-china-sicherheitsbehoerden.

[98] European Parliament Research Service, Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA).

missile."[99] The general increased incidence of cyberattacks raises fears that space travel will not be exempt in the future. Enormous political, economic and research-technological setbacks would have to be assumed. Direct ones with partly catastrophic effects on the Earth, e.g. through "space debris" not burning up in the Earth's atmosphere, cannot be ruled out.

Conclusion

High technology and especially the Outer Space domain – both inextricably linked to cyber – are traded as game-changers of our future. In terms of security policy, however, this future seems to have already arrived. This contradiction has to be viewed ambivalently. On the one hand, space research leads us to expect international cooperation with China, due to the high financial challenges; on the other hand, a battle is being waged in and above Cyberspace. The wish that "[s]pace is a treasure shared by all humanity and an important driving force for global economic development" illustrates China's pragmatic intention to cooperate and confirms China's narrative of a morally shaped great power. Development of this cooperation will depend on mutual trust and require intensive and sustained persuasion on the part of all parties. It remains to be seen whether the politically opposing systems will stand in each other's way.

Due to the conflicting narratives of the actors concerned, smooth solution concepts are not to be expected. In this respect, even openly accessible US security analyses speak a clear language.

"According to the US Department of Defense, the US 'faces serious and growing challenges to its freedom to operate in space.' China and Russia, it said, 'view counterspace capabilities as a means to reduce US and allied

[99] The original quotation reads: "[…] Strom- und Wasserversorgung ganzer Staaten lahmlegen, unsere Transportsysteme, die Finanzwirtschaft" und es "[…] schwieriger ist, einen Cyberangriff zu identifizieren, als eine ballistische Rakete aufzuspüren," James Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe in a Spiegel interview, Bernhard Zand, *Der Spiegel*, April 17, 2021, "Es wäre naiv zu sagen, China sei kein Problem." [It would be naive to say that China isn't a problem.], 86.

military effectiveness'."[100] China seems to be an indispensable partner for science and research, especially in space travel, thanks to the countless cooperations it is seeking. For smaller Western companies in particular, the question arises how far they are perceived as equal cooperation partners by China and how quickly research results flow into marketable products and who contributes them. China's commitment to the UN-SPIDER programme in particular, with the "[…] Ministry of Emergency Management of the People's Republic of China, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China National Space Administration (CNSA) and the Asia Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO)"[101] is remarkable. The EU should act with caution here, so that it does not fall behind, due to overly complex legal frameworks and decision-making processes. It will be up to the UN as well as the EU to ensure an appropriate balance.

If China is striving for credible EU cooperation, it must be its goal to take the strongest possible action against any attacks by Chinese hackers emanating from its territory, using all available means. In this regard, the EU has been trying since 2016 to reach a "[…] political agreement with China on combating cyber-enabled theft of IPR [intellectual property rights] and trade secrets."[102] An agreement between China and the EU should be sought. China would gain credibility.

As a former commander of the NATO Supreme Command in Europe noted, "China spends its money very intelligently and is extremely focused not only on offensive cyber weapons but on its space programme, hypersonic missiles and stealth technology."[103] Such strategic actions should always be taken into account.

In order not to put itself at a disadvantage, Europe should also remember the statement of political scientist Kishore Mahbubani from Singapore, who

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[100] IISS, *The Military Balance 2020*, February 2020, "The Space Domain: towards a Regular realm of conflict?", https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/military-balance-2020-book/the-space-domain-towards-a-regular-realm-of-conflict.

[101] UNOOSA, Annual Report 2019.

[102] European Commission, "Joint Communication," 9.

[103] The original quotation reads: "China gibt sein Geld sehr intelligent aus und ist extrem fokussiert nicht nur auf offensive Cyberwaffen, sondern auf sein Wetlraumprogramm, auf Hyperschallflugkörper und Tarnkappentechnologie," Stavridis, *Der Spiegel*.

has been proclaiming the "Asian century" for years, that "Western elites need to develop a good understanding of this new era that is emerging forcefully, and work with their own populations to formulate thoughtful and pragmatic policy responses."[104] This means to live with a China that exists – and not with a China that we wish would exist.[105] The "Chinese dragon" has staying power, i.e. long-term strategy, which must also be the EU's goal.

[104] Kishore Mahbubani (2018), *Has the West Lost it?*, Pinguin Books, 24.

[105] See Fabian Kretschmer, "Der Triumph der ungeliebten Weltmacht," *Die Presse*, December 31, 2020, 3.

The Moral Narrative of the "Secular Great Power with a Global Responsibility"

Johannes Berchtold

Morality and politics

In order to speak about moral narratives of a great power and judge them, we have to establish an understanding of the concept of "morality" and the terms relevant for it. This is particularly necessary because concepts such as morality sometimes have different meanings and contexts in different cultures. Clarifying terms in advance saves us from misunderstandings in retrospect or political practice.

In recent politics, questions of morality and ethics are often compared with so-called factual constraints and questions of power. Politics is, so to speak, caught in the middle and has to mediate between these two sides. Ethics deals scientifically with the possibility of a general justification of morality. In his work "On the discord between morality and politics, with a view to eternal peace" the great Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant says the following about the tension between politics and morality:

> Politics says: "Be wise as serpents;" morality adds (as a limiting condition): "and without guile as doves."

If the two cannot exist together in one commandment, there really is a dispute between politics and morality; but, if both are to be united, the concept of opposite is absurd and the question as to how this dispute is to be balanced cannot even be posed as a task.[1] Here, Kant refers to the biblical word: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and without guile as doves." (Matthew, 10, 16)

For Kant, it is clear that one cannot stop at this contradiction between politics and morality. More importantly, Kant distinguishes between a moral

[1] Immanuel Kant, "Zum ewigen Frieden," in *Kants Werke*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968) 8:370.

politician and a moralising politician in this context. The latter does not act in accord with the good, but taking the good as a pretext, he only wants to appear to be good. In other words, this is a matter of hypocrisy.

> Now I can conceive of a moral politician, i.e. one who takes the principles of statesmanship in such a way that they can exist together with morality, but not of a political moralist who forges a morality for himself so it works to the statesman's advantage.[2]

According to Kant, forging morality for oneself in such a way that it lends moral legitimacy to one's own interests is, of course, to be described as immoral or reprehensible.

The deceitfulness of those politicians who orientate themselves on "snake turns of an immoral prudence doctrine" must be exposed. For us, the first task, among other things, is to find out the difference between moralists and moral politicians, to realise…

> ...that the political moralist begins where the moral politician rightly ends and, by therefore subordinating principles to goals (i.e. putting the horses behind the cart), thwarts his own intention to bring politics into harmony with morality.[3]

But does the moralist really frustrate his own intention? After all, he argues from a moral point of view only for the sake of appearances; he keeps his true intentions hidden, at least publicly. But can, what might be accomplished by individual politicians, also be achieved by states and world powers?

One thing stands out more clearly than ever in this context, especially with regard to media effectiveness. In politics, the issue of morality is increasingly gaining importance. However, as a result, it is also turning into a power factor, which in turn can lead to ambivalences between morality and politics. The danger of instrumentalising morality in political discourse increases with the importance of moral narratives in politics. Niccolò Machiavelli expressed

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[2] Kant, "Zum ewigen Frieden," 8:372.
[3] Ibid., 8:376.

that bluntly. What he stated in his "Il Principe" no one today would dare to seriously cite as his or her own opinion. Machiavelli says of the prince/ruler:

> All that is seen and heard of him must breathe compassion, loyalty, humanity, probity and piety. And nothing is more necessary than the illusion of this last virtue...[4]

But how can reality and appearance be distinguished with certainty in the realm of moral? The hallmark of a subject's morality is the sphere of inwardness. Whether someone has acted morally or only pretended to do so for utilitarian reasons cannot be proven with absolute certainty, because moral decisions are decisions of conscience, and looking into another person's conscience is a divine but not a human art. Everyone can only examine his or her own conscience; anything else would be a doomed authoritarian attempt at control. In any case, politics that seeks to control the sphere of conscience is authoritarian and incompatible with our understanding of freedom. George Orwell and many others have set their wits on this. Inwardness is contrasted with empirically ascertainable outwardness. Actions – whether morally motivated or not – have an external side, they can be analysed. A person's motivation for his or her actions, however, cannot be determined with absolute certainty. We can draw our conclusions about the motivation behind actions from the sum of actions in a particular field of politics. That distinguishing between truthfulness and hypocrisy is critical for the future of political communities is summed up by the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk:

> I would venture the guess that societies in which more than fifty per cent of all utterances are spoken on the basis of hypocrisy are doomed in the medium term.[5]

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[4] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe/Der Fürst* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), 138–39.

[5] René Scheu, "50 Prozent Freiheit, 50 Prozent Zwang," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Internationale Ausgabe) February 11, 2021, 17.

Kant raised the question of publicness in this context and attempted a "transcendental formula of public law":

> All actions relating to the right of other people whose maxim is not compatible with publicness are unlawful.[6]

Accordingly, the maxim of the act would have to be able to claim universally binding validity. Morality and publicness appear ambivalent to a certain degree. I can verify the law – as a set of statutory positive laws. All utterances of political communities are to be evaluated as utterances. Despite this fact, moral argumentation is increasingly counted as part of political strategy; moral legitimacy, not to say war of words – or is it serious dialogue?

Distinguishing between law, morality and ethical life *(Sittlichkeit)* with regard to state action

The standard for the current analysis is the concept of the freedom of citizens in the state. According to what was said before, the law characterises the external sphere of freedom. Whether an action conforms to the law can be verified. Otherwise, law would not be enforceable. Morality characterises the inner sphere of freedom, the decision of conscience or freedom of conscience. Only the acting person knows whether an action is in line with conscience. Ideally, the external and internal spheres of freedom coincide in political action, this coincidence being understood in the philosophical tradition as the concept of ethical life.

All are equal before the law, as the saying goes. This is precisely the abstraction that law must necessarily make. Apart from taking into account age and external circumstances etc., the law can ultimately only provide a general framework that applies equally to all those subject to it. Acting in accordance with the law is lawful and can, inter alia, be examined by a court. Moral action means action according to one's own decision of conscience; in the extreme or individual case this can also come into conflict with the law. A state whose legal system increasingly comes into conflict with its citizens' decisions of conscience is fundamentally called into question or loses the consent of its citizens and falters or comes under pressure to

[6] Kant, "Zum ewigen Frieden," 8:381.

develop further (cf. evolution or revolution). Insofar as legislation is based on the consciousness of citizens regarding their freedom (law is ideally based on justice) and is therefore principally in harmony with the inner conviction of its citizens, the law is supported by the citizens and, in turn, the law protects the citizens. This harmony between the inner and outer spheres of freedom is contained in and expressed by the concept of ethical life. According to classical philosophy, family and state are the two forms of ethical life.[7] The spirit that unites them forms the substantial freedom in which the members feel protected in the community, recognised, valued and strengthened in their individual freedom. The state as a system of freedom in the sense of ethical life is (according to its concept) based on the common identity and common will of its citizens. The actions in accordance with ethical life of the citizens of a state spring from this spirit of unity. This is not to be understood as a static or unchanging entity. As the awareness of freedom progresses, the state will develop further, also in legal terms. In this context, the stability of the state is of central importance for China.

From what has been said already, significant differences arise between the narratives of Europe and China, even in relation to the same terms. According to a study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on the developing country China, the country also sees itself as a "moral state"[8], in which Marxist or "socialist core values have been declared the new moral key factor". This is a central point in our analysis. Moral action – as we said at the beginning – is characterised by the sphere of inwardness, the action according to a subjective decision of conscience. Can a state system define itself as a moral subject, a moral state, without undermining the so-called balance between citizens and state based on the spirit of unity?

> The state is the reality of concrete freedom; but concrete freedom consists in the fact that the single individual and its particular interests have both the complete development and the recognition of their personal right (in the system of the family and of civil society), which through themselves partly pass into the general interest. The principle of modern states has this tremendous strength and depth of allowing the principle of subjectivity to

[7] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 292–512 (§§ 142–360).

[8] Thomas Heberer and Armin Müller, *Entwicklungsstaat China. Politik, Wirtschaft, sozialer Zusammenhalt und Ideologie*, (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020), 12.

> complete itself to the independent extreme of personal particularity and, at the same time, to drive it back into substantial unity and thus preserve the latter in it.[9]

This formulation regarding the aforementioned balance between citizen and state goes back to the great state philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. It presents the principle of the modern state: the principle of subjectivity, which "through itself" passes into the general interest of the state. Hegel even calls this principle the "independent extreme of personal particularity." Individual freedom is given an inalienable status. In the modern state, the unity of the subjective will of the citizens with the common good or interest of the state becomes apparent through the will of the citizens themselves. Can this be reconciled with the "moral state of China"? The autonomy of the collective – apart from "personal particularity" – especially in the sense of social and political stability enjoys priority in China. All philosophy and religious teachings – "traditionally, no distinction was made in the Chinese language between philosophical and religious theories"[10] – have to…

> …interpret the "norms and dogmas *(of the various religions, author's note)* in such a way that they correspond to the requirements of progress and development of contemporary China," they are to be guided to orientate themselves towards Chinese specifics and to adapt to the "socialist society" of China. (Renmin-wang 2016; Xi Jinping 2016).[11]

Regarding which sphere, now, does the Chinese state set the guidelines? In other words, how does the Chinese state see itself in terms of law, morality and ethical life? Are there fundamental differences between the Chinese and the European self-image, and what is the justification of preferring one view to the other? "Unlike in the West, law has traditionally played a rather minor role"[12], according to the authors of the cited study by the Ebert Foundation. Accession to the WTO has contributed to a juridification, mostly in the economic sphere. In general, there has been progress regarding the development of the legal system in China.

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9 Hegel, *Werke*, 7:406–07 (§ 260).
10 Heberer and Müller, *Entwicklungsstaat China*, 22.
11 Ibid., 22.
12 Ibid., 24.

> What is lacking above all is the question of the implementation of legal provisions; the law and legal institutions are still regarded as instruments of the enforcement of state interests and not as instruments of the citizens. Lawyers representing people who are considered "enemies of the state" are themselves often accused of anti-state activities.[13]

According to this, the law cannot really be enforced by citizens against the party interests that represent the state interests. Morality, in the self-image of the Chinese Communist Party, is almost equated with the concept of ethical life briefly described above.

In this, we can see a form of direct ethical life as it was found in the original form of the Greek Polis. In Greek antiquity, a good person and a good citizen were regarded as directly identical, congruent. Socrates as the "inventor" of conscience first initiated the division between morality and direct ethical life. For this, the Polis, his hometown Athens, condemned him to death. In the well-known Phaedo dialogue, Plato depicts in a literarily romanticised way how Socrates finally drank from the cup of hemlock and died. The "Socratic conscience," however, has survived the old form of the Greek Polis. Socrates' "discovery", so to say, had to establish itself in ethical life over the centuries in both the division and the relationship between law and morality. We know enough historical examples of the conflict between the conscience of individual citizens and state law or action. It is a long way from direct to modern ethical life expressed through the morality of individuals. If, on the other hand, state power dictates what morality is, the aforementioned balance between citizens and state power is missing.

A comparable direct conformity between the external and internal spheres of freedom underlies the enforcement of Chinese Party and State interests, whereas the distinction/separation of or mediation between them is downright essential for the European understanding of freedom and democracy. For the further development of the states' concept of freedom, this is as essential as the separation of state and religion. This does not mean that state and religion have no relationship to each other. The citizens' conscience can be shaped on the basis of religious beliefs, which is also relevant for their civil rights and rights of freedom. Due to religious freedom,

[13] Ibid., 24.

however, this is not moral paternalism exerted by a state that also controls the law – and thus, in China's case, the external and internal spheres of freedom – or claims representation of both spheres for itself and therefore has a problem of legitimacy before the people as sovereign. Even if China's official canon of values includes democracy – admittedly interpreted differently than in the West – this means in short: The (Unity) Party is the conscience of the nation. One could give the Chinese Communist Party credit for recognising a "spiritual vacuum"[14] that originated in the West, due to a misconceived separation of state and religion, and experiencing that vacuum as a loss of values and foundations for the state, and therefore attempting to "construct a spiritual civilisation"[15]. From a Western perspective, the modern state is not directly legitimised to do this.

An example will illustrate what has been said before. Under the title "Wie Pekings Herrscher eine Filmstar-Ikone abstürzen ließen [How Beijing's rulers ruined the career of a movie star icon]", Fabian Kretschmer writes in the newspaper *Die Presse*[16] about a surrogate mother scandal involving the Chinese actress Zheng Shuang. The actress and her partner had hired two surrogate mothers in the USA. However, the legal situation in China concerning this case is unclear.

> Although the Ministry of Health has officially banned surrogate motherhood within the country's borders, there has been no mention in the corresponding statutory provisions so far – a typically vague solution, which is common in China.[17]

The actress' "offence" is therefore not in contradiction with national statutory law. The state has to abide by the law. The national broadcasting authority, however, has announced that the actress "will be banned from the country's television screens and radio airwaves"[18]. For the *Die Presse* correspondent, "her case also demonstrates the self-image of the Communist Party, which sees itself not only as a guardian of the law, but also as a moral

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14 Heberer and Müller, *Entwicklungsstaat China*, 21.
15 Ibid., 21.
16 Fabian Kretschmer, "Wie Pekings Herrscher eine Filmstar-Ikone abstürzen ließen," *Die Presse*, January 26, 2021, 12.
17 Ibid., 12.
18 Ibid., 12.

authority".[19] China's much-described so-called "social credit system," which is supposed to measure the trustworthiness of citizens, further increases the power of the state and the ruling Unity Party vis-à-vis the citizens. In this sense, Western media would also be ill-advised to hastily attribute to politicians or public figures the status of "moral authorities." These personalities may appeal to the conscience of the citizens, but the moral authority par excellence is the individual's conscience, which is inaccessible from the outside.

Linking traditional Chinese culture with communist ideology

What has been described in the previous chapter may be summarised under the notion of direct or unreflected, not further in itself differentiated, ethical life. How did this come about, given China's long historical and cultural tradition and the relatively short but "profound" and fundamental imprint of communist thought in China's organisation of the state? Is there a bridge or even a certain continuity between China's traditional constitutionality and the People's Republic of China in the 21st century? Could such a "systemic change" even take place without a certain continuity?

In order to answer these questions and also to better understand the problems presented in the previous chapter, it is worthwhile to take a look at the remarks of the already quoted philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770 - 1831) on China in his lectures on the philosophy of history. Loosely based on Hegel, everyone is a child of his or her time, as is his philosophical view on history – also with regard to the state of knowledge at the time. For the analysis and assessment of the extent to which there is continuity between millennia-old Chinese culture and the communist China of today, Hegel's remarks are in any case an excellent source for any basic research in this field.

> History has to begin with the Chinese empire, for it is the oldest as far as history can tell, and its principle is of such substantiality that it is, at the same time, the oldest and the newest for this empire. At an early stage, already, we see China growing into the shape it is in now; as the opposition of objective being and subjective movement towards being is still missing, all changeability is impossible, and the abiding, which eternally reappears,

[19] Ibid., 12.

> replaces what we would call the historical. China and India still lie, as it were, outside world history, history as the prerequisite of the moments whose interconnection only becomes its living progress. The unity of substantiality and subjective freedom is therefore without distinction and opposition of both sides that precisely because of this, the substance is unable to reflection in itself and reach subjectivity. Thus, the substantial, which appears as the ethical life, does not rule as the convictions of the subject, but as despotism of the ruler.[20]

So much for a glimpse on the China of days gone by. The "stationary condition" of China and India has been disrupted in more recent times; both states have become "players" in world politics, especially in times of (economic and technical) globalisation. More than one third of the world's population lives in these two countries. The ponderousness but also constancy of these countries in the past may partly also be due to their gigantic size and population. Hegel begins the observation of world history with China; the further historical development heads towards the West (Oriental, Greek, Roman and finally Christian cultures). This geographically visible progress finally ends in the United States of America as the representative of the leading culture still valid today. The cultural progress beginning in the East and ending in the West has now come to an end in this form; the circle is closed; globalisation heralds a new era of historical development. A worldwide reciprocal system of relations between states and powers characterises the further course of history and the struggle for supremacy. Globalisation is not just an economic-technical struggle, but a competition of norms and systems.[21] The adoption of communist thinking as a "world view" in China is itself already a first step in the already started globalisation, the adoption of a "European" ideology in the Far East. It is remarkable that this ideology was not so successful in the West, which in turn has not only historical reasons but also, as outlined below, logical reasons.

According to the Marxist theory of historical stages of development of society, feudalist society is to be followed by capitalist society, socialist society and, finally, communist society. The historical change of property

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[20] Hegel, *Werke*, 12:147.

[21] Cf. also Micha Brumlik, "Der Kampf der Weltanschauungen", *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, no. 10 (October 2020): 81–90.

relations is the dominant factor here. A central concept is bourgeois society. The French Revolution abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property. Communism abolishes bourgeois and, thus, private property altogether. The Communist Manifesto of 1848 states:

> The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution and because it is to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilisation and with a much more developed proletariat than that of England and France in the seventeenth and, respectively, eighteenth century, the bourgeois revolution in Germany can only be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.[22]

However, Marx misjudged these advanced conditions in bourgeois society. The concept of bourgeois society in Hegel's philosophy – from where Marx took the term – is antecedent to the concept of state and does not represent the substantial generality as represented by the state. In bourgeois society, an external competitive relationship between individuals dominated by economic principles prevails; in the state, however, the citizens are connected in the sense of ethical life. According to classical philosophy, the economy is to be an expedient to the self-sufficiency of the state and its citizens. Although bourgeois society is one of the necessary foundations of freedom within a modern state system, it is embedded and regulated in the state, the state being the spirit of unity of its citizens. In the Communist Manifesto, however, we read: "The workers have no fatherland."[23] If we assume that the state acts in an integrative way while the market is expansive, Marx presented a questionable pattern of identity with his absolutizing concept of society. Apparently, Hegel already saw something like this dawning:

> If the state is mistaken for bourgeois society and its purpose is placed in the security and protection of property and personal freedom, then the interest of individuals as such is the ultimate end for which they are united, and it equally follows from this that it is something arbitrary to be a member of the state.[24]

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[22] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin/DDR: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1959), 493.

[23] Ibid., 4:490.

[24] Hegel, *Werke*, 7:399 (remark to § 258).

Marx' theses are based on this "confusion" of the outwardly remaining connection of the individuals within a society, and their connection in the way of ethical life within the state. However, the market's expansive pursuit of development is somewhat more accurately reflected in the Communist Manifesto – in contrast to the alleged lack of homeland or state identity of the worker:

> The national separation and contrasts between the peoples are disappearing more and more with the development of the bourgeoisie, the freedom of trade, the world market, the uniformity of industrial production, and the living conditions corresponding to it.[25]

By contrast, with Hegel we would say: With regard to dignity, civil rights and liberties of citizens, and their cultural identity, the exorbitance and boundlessness of the market must be abolished by politics and the very purpose of freedom in the state. Since communism was conceived as internationalist from the outset, Marx chose the concept of state or nation as a temporary vehicle at best leading to international classless society, as actor on the world stage, replacing the state in the sense of ethical life. According to this, progress in history is not – as with Hegel – a result of the competition between states (and their understanding of freedom), but rather to the inconsistencies in the property situation (of bourgeois society). As we will see below, this lack of deepening of the concept of state has also continued in China's current political system. In China, the bourgeois revolution was "skipped," so to speak. Communism – in contradiction to Marx' theses – was essentially able to gain a foothold where the bourgeois revolution had not taken place and the associated civil liberties had not been established. Thus, these states cannot do without restrictive measures against their own citizens or, respectively, a corresponding system of control.

The parts of Hegel's consideration of ancient Chinese culture we can still consider valid today regarding the country's continuity are his statements about the lack of contradiction "of objective being and subjective movement towards the being", that there is a unity "of substantiality and subjective freedom", still "without distinction and opposition of both sides, and that precisely because of this, the substance is unable to reach reflection in itself

[25] Marx and Engels, *Werke*, 4:479.

and reach subjectivity. Thus, the substantial, which appears as the ethical life, does not rule as the convictions of the subject, but as despotism of the ruler." Similar to the Greek Polis and unlike Socrates, ancient China lacked the "discovery" of conscience, which subsequently went down in history as conscience formed by Christianity.

Hence, Hegel is able to conclude about the condition or state organisation of ancient China:

> We now pass from this data in Chinese history to the consideration of the spirit of the constitution, which has always remained the same. It results from the general principle. For the latter is the direct unity of the substantial spirit and the individual; but this is the family spirit, which here is extended to the most populous country. The moment of subjectivity, that is, the self-reflection of the individual will set against the substance, as the power consuming it, or the recognition of this power as the individual's own essence, in which it knows itself free, is not yet present here. The general will is directly active through the individual. [...] This family basis is also the basis of the constitution, if one can speak of such a thing. For although the emperor has the right of a monarch who stands at the top of a whole state, he exercises it in the manner of a father over his children. He is the patriarch and heaped upon him is all that can claim reverence in the state. For the emperor is also the head of religion and science, [...] This paternal care of the emperor and the spirit of his subjects as children, who do not step out of the moral family circle and cannot gain independent and civil freedom for themselves, make the whole one empire, government and conduct...[26]

The above-mentioned "direct" unity of the substantial spirit and the individual characterises the "direct" form of ethical life. In the family, it is logically present in a more direct form. In love, in the feeling of togetherness of the family members, they understand themselves "essentially" as members, therefore, not as singular persons.[27]According to Hegel, a modern state rises above direct ethical life. However, according to what has been said, this was precisely the case in ancient China, where the family form of ethical life was applied to the state's unity. The patriarchal form of family structure was applied to the state form.

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[26] Hegel, *Werke*, 12:152–56.
[27] Ibid., 7:307–08 (§ 158).

Yet, the modern concept of ethical life – so the key statement – cannot stay with this directness. Normally, when growing up, the individual family member steps out of the family unit into independence and becomes a member of society as a free citizen; by doing that, however, he has just brought his own subjective interests to bear against others and can start his own family. Only in the state that regulates bourgeois society has he transformed his direct ethical life into ethical life mediated through bourgeois society, through the formation of individual interests. As a member of the state, as a state citizen he is settled within a greater general than the family was and continues to be. In the modern state, the individual leads a general life, but one that is "mediated" and he or she thus knows that his or her individual rights as well as his freedom of conscience are recognised also in distinction or demarcation from state interests.

By contrast, Hegel sees the situation in ancient China as follows:

> The other matter is the imperial administration. We cannot speak of a constitution here for that would mean individuals and corporations have independent rights, partly in relation to their particular interests, partly in relation to the whole state. This element must be missing here, and we can only speak of an imperial administration. China is the empire of absolute equality, and all differences that exist are only possible through the imperial administration and the dignity that each person attributes to himself to attain a high level in this administration. Because in China there is equality, but no freedom, despotism is the necessarily given mode of government. With us, men are equal only before the law and in the respect that they own property; besides, they have many interests and many peculiarities, which must be guaranteed if freedom is to exist for us. In the Chinese empire, however, these special interests are not rightful in themselves, and the government merely lies with the emperor, who leads it as a hierarchy of officials or mandarins.[28]

The equality before the law "with us" referred to by Hegel is anchored in the recognition of the citizens of the state as free and equal. In this context and in accordance with the Kantian categorical imperative, the civic individual as a human being is fundamentally never to be regarded merely as a means to an end, but always also as an end in itself. This provision raises the

[28] Hegel, *Werke*, 12:157–58.

connection between freedom and equality to a level that springs from a Christian concept of the human being. The central statement in Hegel's previous quotation is the lack of rights of individuals and corporations with regard to the power of the state and the "priority" of equality over freedom in ancient China. We are reminded of the situation in contemporary China outlined in the previous chapter, the difficulties in asserting rights vis-à-vis the (moral) state, which is ultimately represented by the Unity Party. In this respect, the need to point out parallels between imperial China and the Chinese world power of today seems obvious. The hierarchy within the Party and among its dependent state officials has almost taken the form or significance of the former imperial power and its state officials in terms of the absence of civil liberties or recognition of individual freedom of conscience. The problem of transferring family structures, i.e. direct ethical life, to the state sphere has not been eradicated in China to this day.

We have heard from Hegel that the emperor in ancient China was also "head of religion and science." In the previous chapter it was stated that, in today's China, norms and dogmas are to be interpreted in such a way by science and religions "that they correspond to the requirements of progress and development of contemporary China," and that they are to be oriented towards Chinese specifics and adapted to China's "socialist society." Thus, in contemporary China as well, freedom of science and the practice of religion are subordinated to (the purposes of) state power. Far from justifying this fact, but in terms of recognising the continuity of a tradition that has lasted for thousands of years, recognition of the latter serves to better understand China and its politics today.

> That Chinese religion, therefore, cannot be what we call religion. For to us, religion is the inwardness of the spirit in itself, in that it imagines in itself what is its innermost being. In these spheres, therefore, man is also withdrawn from the relationship with the state and, taking refuge in inwardness, is able to escape from the power of worldly regiment. But religion in China is not on this level, for true faith is only possible where individuals are in themselves, independent of an external driving force.[29]

[29] Ibid., 12:166.

Despite the difficulty of speaking scientifically about "true faith" in view of the cultural relativism rampant in the West – Hegel speaks on the basis of the Christian religion – a reference to the Chinese state power's treatment of the Uyghurs is necessary. The Uyghurs are currently targeted by the Chinese government as an ethnic minority, but first and foremost as an Islamic religious community. "In a secret series of speeches, later leaked with other documents to the *New York Times*, Head of state and Party leader Xi Jinping spoke in 2014 of the "poison of religious extremism," according to him, China has to wage a merciless fight against terrorism, infiltration and separatism (cf. texts of his speech)."[30] The fight against religious extremism is also an issue in the so-called Western world. The terrorist attacks of the Islamist network al-Qaida on September 11, 2001 in the United States of America are rooted in international collective memory. In public discourse, there have been many discussions about the concept of political Islam, the question of distinguishing between Islam and Islamism, etc. On Wikipedia we read, among other things: "In the history of Islam, there has been neither a complete separation of state and religion nor a complete unity of religion and everyday practice."[31] Without wanting to go into this complex topic, we will only focus on the statement that there has not been a complete separation of state and religion in the history of Islam. If this is the case, are we again dealing with "direct ethical life"? This would explain some of the difficulties enlightened societies have with Islam. In China, in the case of the oppression of the Uyghurs, one form of direct ethical life would thus be the fighting against another. In order to understand China's policy, without legitimising it, we have to understand that a country like China, for which stability and thus internal and external sovereignty have top priority, tries to nip possible dangers emanating from radical Islam in the bud by fighting it mercilessly in the own country. From this perspective, international criticism of the treatment of the Uyghurs is dismissed as interference in internal affairs. The fact that the USA and the EU have drawn completely different conclusions with regard to dealing with Islamist terror results, among other things, from the clear separation of state and religion.

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30 Katrin Büchenbacher et al., "Sie sagten, der Islam sei ein Virus, von dem wir geheilt werden müssten," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Internationale Ausgabe), March 27, 2021, 5.

31 "Politischer Islam," *Wikipedia*, last modified May 21, 2021, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politischer_Islam.

Finally, Hegel's view of science in the state of direct ethical life:

> If, on the one hand, the sciences seem to be highly honoured and cultivated, they lack, on the other hand, precisely that free ground of inwardness and the actual scientific interest that makes them a theoretical occupation. A free, ideational realm of the spirit has no place here, and what can be called scientific here is of an empirical nature and stands essentially in the service of what is useful for the state and the state's and its citizen's needs.[32]

The danger of a concept of education that gives priority to the utilitarian aspect, i.e. putting training before general education, is also of universal importance against the background of evaluating Chinese and Western narratives.

Despite all the continuity in Chinese culture, it should be noted that the sleeping giant China has awakened. What Hegel in his time described as abiding no longer applies in this generality. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Qing dynasty lay in ruins. A new beginning characterised by globalisation was already emerging. Not only through the economy and its inherent contradiction according to communist ideology, did the idea of development and progress enter Chinese culture.

In the so-called Mao Bible ("Little Red Book") we read:

> The new social order must be consolidated step by step. Its final consolidation requires not only the realisation of the socialist industrialisation of the country and the persistent continuation of the socialist revolution on the economic front, but also the constant, untiring struggle for the socialist revolution on the political and ideological front and the implementation of socialist education. To this end, the interaction of various international conditions is also necessary.[33]

In addition to modern industry and agriculture, modern science and culture are to be developed and the look is to turn to the international stage. This is an awakening of a country rich in tradition, which encompasses all areas of social and state life and subjects them to a "modernisation process." It

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[32] Hegel, *Werke*, 12:169.

[33] Mao Tse-tung, *Worte des Vorsitzenden Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Verlag für fremdsprachige Literatur, 1967), chap. III.

happens in the awareness that this development will continue over a long period of history. In this sense, the Chinese Communist Party does not shy away from presenting China as a developing country – a narrative that can have different meanings and hopefully leaves a door open for the further development of China's political culture. After Mao, China was prepared, at least in economic terms, to partially abandon communist dogmas and has also been successful in doing so.

Examples of Chinese and Western moral narratives

What do the (inter alia Western) narratives on China – circulating in our media during China's rise to a world power and its role as a central player in the global economy mean against this background? Is there anyone among us who has not often purchased a product made in China or rather in the People's Republic of China (which already brings us to a fundamental political narrative), perhaps even for lack of (affordable) alternatives? From a general political point of view, by now, we can speak of European dependence on the Chinese economy. China has become an almost indispensable producer and supplier of products, as well as an indispensable market for European products, even under unequal competitive conditions, which is again due to the specific political framework conditions.

In the *Standard* newspaper of January 1, 2021, Philipp Mattheis took a hard look at China's Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with the EU, which had just received a first political approval. Beijing, or rather the state-owned newspaper *Global Times*, called the agreement a "gift to the world". This Chinese narrative conveys the self-confidence of the People's Republic of China as a global power and, at the same time, China's benevolence. According to Chinese understanding, the concept of a gift involves the interest in a functioning cooperation in the sense of mutual give and take (keyword: reciprocity culture). What, on the other hand, is the media echo in the West or the narrative of the Western media? Mattheis called it a "gift for Beijing" and mainly put the resulting better market access for European companies in China – with "unfair trade practices such as joint venture coercion in key industries" remaining unchanged – in relation to the context of human rights violations in China, the EU's transatlantic relations and European values.

> But the agreement becomes a farce, when top politicians concoct a deal behind closed doors with a state whose human rights violations reached a low point just in the past year. The leadership in Beijing is cramming hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs into labour camps. Hong Kong's autonomy has de facto ended, democracy activists have been sentenced to draconian prison terms. Yes, European companies now have a little more legal certainty in the world's largest market. But the price for the agreement is high for the EU has alienated its transatlantic partner and betrayed its values for its sake.[34]

Between the "gift to the world" and the betrayal of values, there is a gap in the political-moral assessment that could hardly be larger.

Christoph B. Schiltz blew the same horn in his commentary at *welt.de* entitled "The Merkel-Xi agreement is a mockery of freedom fighters":

> When will Europe finally start to understand China? The regime acts according to the principle of Tianxia (everything under one sky), with everything oriented towards the Middle Kingdom ("Reich der Mitte"). The goal of the industrial strategy "Made in China 2025" is therefore not a competition between partners, but the state-orchestrated elimination of international competition in all markets in the coming decades.[35]

Now there is a significant difference between being politically responsible for the German economy or the economic prospects of the EU in China, on the one hand, and writing a political commentary in a newspaper, on the other hand. On the newspaper market, too, every newspaper has its political tendencies. In any case, international (economic) relations cannot be guided only by moral categories. The question of whether this is about uniting "everything under one sky" or "everything under the Middle Kingdom" is, however, also of relevance to security policy and concerns the nerve of the sovereignty of states and of the EU as a state community. The rejection of

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[34] Philipp Mattheis, "EU-Abkommen mit China: Ein Geschenk für Peking," *Der Standard*, January 1, 2021, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000122885465/eu-abkommen-mit-china-ein-geschenk-fuer-peking.

[35] Christoph B. Schiltz, "Das Merkel-Xi-Abkommen ist ein Hohn für die Freiheitskämpfer," *Die Welt*, January 2, 2021, https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article223637610/EU-Vertrag-mit-China-Das-Merkel-Xi-Abkommen-ist-ein-Hohn-fuer-die-Freiheitskaempfer.html.

the above-mentioned investment deal was, among other things, a topic at the Group of Seven (G7) meeting at the beginning of May 2021. The EU parliament froze the ratification of the CAI agreement. "One has suspended the path to ratification of the investment deal with China, due to quarrels with China," said the Vice President of the European Commission: "The environment is not conducive to the ratification of the agreement." In this context US Foreign Minister Blinken addressed the narrative of a liberal world order:

> "What we are trying to do is to uphold the international rules-based order that our countries have invested so much in over so many decades to the benefit, I would argue, not just of our own citizens, but of people around the world – including, by the way, China," Blinken said.[36]

The fact that the vying – also in the sense of positive competition – between states "takes place" on different political levels, and that the media or narrative "venue" is becoming increasingly important in addition to the economic one, means that security policy must also devote more attention to this issue.

In this context, the *FAZ* even spoke of the "battle of narratives":

> While French hospitals are on the verge of collapse in the face of the flood of seriously ill Covid-19 patients, Ambassador Lu Shaye sends "Reflections of a Chinese Diplomat in Paris." "Why can't old democracies in Europe and America bring the epidemic under control?" he asks, seemingly worried, only to immediately present the "individualism" and "egoism of the West" as the explanation. Asian countries are "particularly powerful" in the fight against Covid-19 because they have a community spirit and civic-mindedness that Western democracies have lost. South Korea, Japan and Singapore have done well, the ambassador writes, but what really stands out is the performance of the People's Republic of China, whose regime has stood the test of time.[37]

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[36] "G7-Treffen: Eine Allianz gegen Moskau und Peking," *Die Presse*, May 4, 2021, 4.

[37] Friederike Böge, Michaela Wiegel and Matthias Wyssuwa, "Wie China die europäischen Demokratien verhöhnt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 1, 2020, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/corona-krise-wie-china-europas-demokratien-verhoehnt-16705688.html.

The central narrative here – apart from the otherwise mostly cultivated narrative of raising the standard of living of the population – is that the political system proves itself in the event of a crisis. The legitimacy of the political system is derived, among other things, from this. The Chinese ambassador in Paris makes no secret of presenting China's political system in this regard as superior to the democracies of the Western world. In the *FAZ* he is also cited as follows:

> Many people greatly admire the success of Chinese governance. They envy the efficiency of our political system and hate their own country's inability to succeed in the same way, he clarifies. Thus, he says, "the label of dictatorship has been attached" to China by others, only to avoid the question why their own country has failed. Contrary to the alleged "beacon of democracy," the United States, it is China that is helping eighty countries to overcome the crisis. The Chinese embassy in France sent out these "reflections" ten thousand times via the Twitter messaging service.[38]

Arguably, this highlights a central political and moral narrative of the Chinese leadership. The alleged failure of democracy, supposedly characterised by individualism and egoism – there is, of course, a world of difference between the two terms – is ultimately contrasted with China's political system, which is purportedly characterised by community spirit, civic-mindedness and efficiency. International relations must then also be judged under this paradigm. The EU as a community of states relies on individual freedom rights and democracy as basic values of state and community action. According to Kant's formula quoted above, the maxim of the EU as well as that of the Chinese leadership seem to be compatible with publicity. The latter maxim is being morally justified, on the one hand, and explained with the pragmatic side of political efficiency, on the other hand. Systemic efficiency and communality are interrelated; what is the use of communality if the political system is inefficient? Both together make for a strong political system, according to the Chinese narrative.

Of course, this narrative can be analysed in terms of the contradictions it contains. Genuine human sympathy requires the highest degree of consideration of individuality. Community spirit presupposes – apart from the complex concept of spirit, which is in any case complex in German – the

[38] Böge, Wiegel and Wyssuwa, "China."

differentiation of diversity and, at the same time, the unity of this diversity, if not a mass-uniform unity is meant, which may, admittedly, easily be steered or controlled. It makes the art of governing look less impressive. Democracy can be exhausting and may drag out decision-making processes, which is accepted in favour of freedom and civil rights. So, the democracy debate cannot be ignored when comparing the narratives. In general, the question of the compatibility of political-moral narratives with publicity will also have to be assessed in the context of the power of the media, their independence, and the associated guidelines of cultural identity.

Religious freedom aside, the central position of the subject in the political system, also propagated by the Enlightenment, is an achievement on which the legitimacy of the political culture of the so-called West is based. The increase in individualisation – as long as it is not understood as arbitrary freedom – within a political-cultural liberal system united by a sense of community is the yardstick for the idea of progress of the 'West'. But not only of the West – so the claim. Olaf Wientzek and Sebastian Enskat write in the *NZZ* of December 17, 2020 about "the liberal world order: saving what can be saved" (Die liberale Weltordnung: retten, was zu retten ist):

> It ultimately seems paradoxical that the liberal world order is in a deep crisis, although multilateralism is invoked everywhere. However, when Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping speak of multilateralism, they mean something completely different than Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron. In the West, the term is (or was) associated with all those principles and values that underlie the liberal world order. For authoritarian state leaders, on the other hand, multilateral organisations are primarily instruments to gain national and international legitimacy for their own authoritarian practices.[39]

After the end of the Cold War, the rise of China thus seems to once again call into question the principles and values of a liberal world order in general and within the international power structure. The regret of the two authors of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation about the "argumentative disarmament" of "the global West" almost seems to carry resignation. Values must not be sacrificed to economic interests; after all, "it is not least the

[39] Olaf Wientzek and Sebastian Enskat, "Retten, was zu retten ist – Joe Biden, Europa und die liberale Weltordnung," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Internationale Ausgabe), December 17, 2020, 13.

normative radiance and credibility of the West on which its weal and woe now depend all the more."[40] In this résumé of the authors, the moral claim that values should not be sacrificed to the economy is not so much in the foreground again, but rather the basis of the West's existence is generally linked to the implementation of a liberal order of values. The message is: The survival of the liberal world order is at stake.

In democratic countries, it is seen as a challenge that "economic growth and social development are possible even without democracy and freedom of expression."[41] In the West, it seems that until now progress as a whole has been assumed to be linked to individual freedoms and democracy. The collapse of the Soviet system was judged in this light. China is different – is it not?

A look back to China's recent history makes clear the tremendous upheavals in a relatively short time, but also raises hopes for further development.[42] Economic liberalisation without democratisation also seems to be successful. Admittedly, success can be defined or specified in different ways.

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40 Ibid., 13.

41 Kretschmer, "Der Triumph," 3.

42 China experienced a very short period of republic between empire and communist rule; the impoverishment of the masses could not be controlled during this unstable period of upheaval. Sun Yat-sen is revered today as the founder of modern China in both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. Sun Yat-sen's party merged several times with various other political parties until he founded the Guomindang. The party founded the first Chinese republic in 1912, gained rule over mainland China in 1927, but after losing the civil war against the Communist Party in 1949, it had to retreat to the island of Taiwan. Today it is part of the democratic multi-party system on Taiwan. The Guomindang initially represented a broad spectrum of political opinions and was at first the only political party one could join to engage in politics in China. Later, the only alternative was between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Sun Yat-sen had supported an alliance with the Communist Party, while Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's successor in the party leadership after his death, rejected cooperation. After the defeat in the struggle against the Communists, Chiang Kai-shek proclaimed the government of the Republic of China on Taiwan at the end of 1949. Under the presidency of his son Chiang Ching-kuo, the democratisation of Taiwan began. On the Chinese mainland, on the other hand, Mao Zedong consolidated the power of the Communist Party. After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping set the country on a capitalist course economically and initiated China's rise to a major global power. Deng admired models of political order such as that of Singapore, which combined strong state authority and economic freedoms.

Even if small and now democratic Taiwan, thanks to high economic growth, has rapidly developed its economic and technological capacities in recent decades, the People's Republic of China, which is disproportionately larger and more populous, is today increasingly flexing its muscles in the concert of the great powers.

> The CP cultivates a nationalist-patriotic narrative with regard to Taiwan, which has become even more acute under Xi Jinping. According to it, the island is a renegade province, which, according to the party leader, must be annexed to China by force if necessary.[43]

Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) emphasises Taiwan's de facto independence. The example of Hong Kong serves as a warning to the Taiwanese people against becoming too closely aligned or even united with mainland China. Taiwan thus offers the People's Republic of China the look in a "critical" mirror, in which a successful Chinese democracy based on the Western model is visible or realised. Further, it should be clear to the West since the People's Republic took over Hong Kong that the "one country – two systems" narrative propagated by Deng Xiaoping at the time, also with regard to Taiwan, has become obsolete.[44]

Under the title "Der Triumph der ungeliebten Weltmacht" [The triumph of the unloved world power] in *Die Presse* of December 31, 2020, the West is also ascribed a certain impotence in dealing with the great power of the People's Republic of China.

> "We have to live with a China that actually exists – and not with a China that we wish would exist," says political scientist Kishore Mahbubani from Singapore, who has been proclaiming the "Asian century" for years. With mischievous passion, he points to Western arrogance in trying to shape the world's most populous country according to its values: "Why does a country like the USA, with less than 250 years of history and a quarter of China's population, think it can change China – and not the other way around?"[45]

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[43] Steffen Richter, "Unausgesprochener Schutz," *Die Zeit*, September 17, 2020, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-09/china-taiwan-konflikt-usa-schutzmacht-diplomatische-beziehung-autonomie.

[44] Burkhard Bischof, "'Taiwan befindet sich direkt an der Frontlinie.' Interview mit Joseph Wu," *Die Presse*, December 29, 2020, 2-3.

[45] Kretschmer, "Der Triumph," 3.

With this statement, however, the political scientist from Singapore focuses only on quantitative categories, without referring to any progress in the awareness of freedom as a criterion. To answer his question, we have to look at the principle of freedom as the essence of our political thinking. Does the West have the "charisma and credibility" to determine progress in history in a general, binding and arguable way that is equivalent to the legitimisation of a liberal world order? If so, moral argumentation alone is in any case not sufficient for the realisation of this freedom.

Even if the so-called Mao Bible has lost some of its appeal, let us look a little closer at two statements by Mao Zedong and make a concluding reflection on the contradiction in the basic understanding of a "world order" and its security policy implications.

> In my view, a new turning point has occurred in the international situation. There are now two air currents in the world: the east wind and the west wind. There is a Chinese proverb that says: "Either the east wind surpasses the west wind, or the west wind surpasses the east wind." I think the peculiarity of the present situation is that the east wind has gained the upper hand over the west wind, that is, the socialist forces are absolutely superior to the imperialist forces.[46]

In this statement, Mao could still categorise the ideological ally Soviet Union as belonging to the east wind, although, at the time already, the alienation between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union became noticeable. Today, the confrontation has shifted to one between China and the US. All the sabre-rattling of the USA towards Russia does not measure up to the actually relevant power play of the great powers. China is on the verge of overtaking the USA as the largest economy. It is not about the question of who is rightly accusing whom of imperialism or not. It is part of the concept of a world power to assert its influence as far as possible. China is on the advance in this respect, the USA in a somewhat defensive position. Both competing systems de facto claim international validity or dominance. The EU, as a transatlantic partner, is not in equidistance, however, without having to assert itself as a leading world power.

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[46] Mao Tse-tung, *Worte des Vorsitzenden*, chap. VI.

There is a saying about the wind blowing its own way. It is the freedom of the spirit that prevails according to this proverb. Who is able to make concrete predictions with regard to a possible peaceful resolution of the conflict or a military escalation of the antagonism described? In what form will the described conflict, which is currently intensifying, be fought in the future?

> The contradictions and the struggle are general, absolute, but the methods of resolving the contradictions, that is, the forms of struggle, differ according to the character of the contradictions. Some contradictions have an openly antagonistic character, others do not. Depending on the concrete development of things, some originally non-antagonistic contradictions become antagonistic, while others, originally antagonistic, become non-antagonistic contradictions. The central task and the highest form of revolution is the armed seizure of power, is the solution of the problem through war. This revolutionary principle of Marxism-Leninism has general validity; it applies everywhere, in China as abroad.[47]

Thus spoke the "great leader" in 1937. Contradiction thus seems to be a necessary moment of development or progress. Whether nuclear deterrence contributes to the fact that war, the armed conduct of conflict, has taken second place "in favour" of other ways of conducting conflict, or whether the forms of conflict between states have become more subtle, not to say more cooperative, taken as a whole – the central conflict for us on the world stage has become obvious in recent years. The means of conflict resolution are economic, technical and narrative by nature.

Taiwan is more than just a touchstone for a face-off between the USA and China. In line with geostrategic considerations, it is about the competition of systems of world order. From the perspective of the European Union and with regard to cooperation but also to the remaining differences and disputes between the US, the EU and China, priority must of course be given to dialogue, to the negotiating table, away from any military confrontation. Of course, never at the price of giving up the position of a liberal world order. This, too, must be further developed through dialogue and international efforts at persuasion. Science and culture not only serve peaceful exchange and encounter, they also represent a certain concept of

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[47] Ibid., chap. IV-V.

humanity and freedom. The once powerful ideologue and propaganda chief Li Changchun, henchman of former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, urged the Chinese media years ago to be "even better at propagating the Party's point of view:"

> Those who have the most modern means of propagating their culture can all the better influence the world and spread their values.[48]

Science and culture, however, should not be misused as a means of transporting party-political goals or for propaganda, but ultimately have their purpose in the education of the human being, his or her freedom in the sense of the Kantian concept of Enlightenment. Much will depend on the extent to which truth and truthfulness instead of hypocrisy prevail in the education and politics of the West and to what extent Europe – which is, after all, not uninvolved in the export of communist ideology to China – can adopt a mediating role with regard to the different concepts of freedom. However, the commitment to a so-called liberal value and world order must not be limited to the transatlantic partners. Globalisation demands an international dialogue of narratives, for which a modern form of self-assurance is needed rather than cultural relativism. The will and the ability to engage in dialogue should not be denied to either side. The competition of systems will go on, and narratives will continue to be used. May it be a constructive competition.

[48] Johnny Erling, "China kämpft gegen 'geschmacklose' TV-Unterhaltung," *Die Welt*, October 31, 2011, https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article13690075/China-kaempft-gegen-geschmacklose-TV-Unterhaltung.html.

The Inherent Cost of Narratives: Realpolitical Obligations and Maneuvering

Doris Vogl

In the previous chapters, several strategic narratives currently utilized by the PR China were presented and examined. Consequently, one general question may arise for the readership: What about the implications of these narratives in political reality? To this end, this chapter takes up the thematic thread of the previous chapters and examines implications in present-day real politics.

Since strategic narratives play a critical role in the PRC's diplomatic performance and the official perception of political events, state leadership is always bound to react in line with the narrative. Otherwise, the project would be doomed to fail and increase the chances of success for counternarratives.

When a state aims to consistently follow its official strategic narratives from the unavoidable context of real-politics, it is confronted with both obligations and constraints on the one hand, as well as windows of opportunities on the other hand. The dissemination and enhancement of narratives is limited to a clearly defined maneuvering room. Security analysis discourse points at engagement within certain limiting frames as "maneuver in the narrative space."[1]

The moral narratives

Johannes Berchtold states in his contribution that moral narratives are playing an increasingly important role in media reality and that the practice of moralizing as an instrument in political discourse is showcasing an upward trend. This makes ethics and morality a growing power factor in the arena of international politics.

[1] Charles L. Moore et al (2016), "Maneuver and Engagement in the Narrative Space," *Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Periodic Publication*, http://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Maneuver-in-the-Narrative-Space_Final_Jan2016.pdf.

Which moral narratives with substantial geopolitical implications – currently disseminated by the People's Republic – is ranking first? There is no consensus concerning this question within academic communities. Thus, in accordance with previous chapters, the author takes the liberty to start with the meta-narrative of China's quest for "justice" in the sense of promoting global fairness at various fronts. The referral to "justice" in the PRC's official documents and statements addressing the international community has shown a significant increase during recent years. At present, Beijing's quest for justice in global affairs as a "responsible major power" has become a standard position in international affairs. In the White Paper on International Development Cooperation published in January 2021, a historic retrospective underlines Beijing's quest for justice since the founding of the People's Republic:

> The Chinese people always preserve a sense of justice and a feeling of sympathy. In 1950, just one year after the founding of the People's Republic, China did its utmost to support other countries in their campaigns for national independence in spite of its own difficulties.
> Over the past seven decades, the Chinese nation has forged ahead, moving from poverty and backwardness towards strength and prosperity. The Chinese people hope that other peoples will also lead a good life while theirs is improving and are willing to contribute as much as they can to other developing countries' efforts to satisfy their people's aspiration for a better life.[2]

Several sub-narratives fall in line with this strongly morally oriented meta-narrative, for example "win-win cooperation," the "right to development" as well as the "Health Silk Road." Not to forget China's extensively advocated vision of a "global community of a shared future."

Beijing's quest for "global justice" addresses the Global South. The PR China presents herself as the largest developing country in the world and considers herself a legitimate advocate of other developing countries.[3] It is precisely

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[2] State Council Information Office of the PRC, *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, January 2021, 5f.

[3] "China is the largest developing country in the world," see preface of the White Paper (January 2021), *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China.

this self-imposed advocacy role that entails considerable obligations and requires maneuvering in real politics. This background invites to take a closer look, following the thematic focus of this chapter.

As mentioned above, it is a non-disputable obligation for the PRC to take sides with the global South vis-a-vis the developed, industrialised countries. This self-imposed duty definitely carries a high degree of geopolitical implication, as regards Beijing's declared quest for global justice. One basic aspect of moral legitimation vis-a-vis the developing world lies in the "just" objectives of a so-called "responsible major power." China as a responsible major power is obliged to support the developing world to catch up with the global North. This aspect is particularly reflected in the pro-active performance of Chinese UN-representatives in the framework of various UN agendas. In terms of monetary contributions to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the People's Republic has been dedicating considerable funds since 2016.[4]

Apart from the issue of financing the UN 2030 Development Goals, effective South-South cooperation includes granting zero-tariff treatment for export items from least developed countries and cancelling unconditional government loans for heavily indebted poor countries. In regard to the G20 debt agenda of late 2020, Beijing claims to have taken the lead in calling for supporting the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative for the poorest countries according to DSSI.[5] In light of such policy initiatives, it can be said that the PR China, unavoidably, has to bear substantial costs in order to gain international credibility in the sense of a "just" global re-balancing.

On April 26, 2021, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, at an opening ceremony, took the opportunity to underline the four principles of China's development cooperation. According to the cross-reference of the anti-

[4] In 2016, two Chinese funds – totalling 5.1 Billion USD – were established at UN level for climate change and South-South cooperation, i.e. the South-South Climate Fund and a fund for the implementation of the SDG, see https://www.southcentre.int/question/chinas-boost-to-south-south-cooperation/.

[5] PR China Ministry of Finance, Written interview with Finance Minister Liu Kun on G20 Debt Agenda, November 2020, http://www.mof.gov.cn/en/news/spe/202011/t20201120_3626593.htm.

hegemonism narrative, it should come as no surprise that the first principle carries a strong flavour of critique addressing the developed western world in between the lines:

> China never uses assistance and development cooperation as a leverage to interfere in others' internal affairs, never attaches any political strings, and never lectures others.[6]

At the same time, the first principle underlines a characteristic of Chinese South-South cooperation, which is met by the Western industrialized world with suspicion:

> China always pursues mutual respect, mutual trust and mutual benefit, and always seeks to consult with others, build together, and share the benefits with other countries.[7]

As regards the openly declared orientation towards "mutual benefit" or "shared benefit," the beginning of maneuvering in the international arena is clearly visible at this point. Utilizing a Maoist methodological approach, certain contradictions can be identified. One contradiction lies in the assumption that South-South cooperation is balanced in an exchange of experiences between countries with similar levels of development and that the relationship between donor and recipient tends to be horizontal. Under this assumption, the principle of "mutual benefit" appears legitimate. On the other hand, the development gap between China as an emerging influential donor country and a larger number of recipient countries, is enormous. Against this backdrop, so-called horizontal structures seem illusory.

Some analysts see an additional contradiction in the fact that, while Chinese representatives include themselves in the "South" when they speak to aid beneficiaries, they also want to be considered as equals in the communication with "Northern" countries.[8]

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[6] CIDCA, April 27, 2021, "Wang Yi sheds light on China's four principles in foreign aid," international development cooperation, http://en.cidca.gov.cn/2021-04/27/c_614587.htm.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See J. Vadell/G. Brutto/A. Leite (2020), "The Chinese South-South development cooperation: an assessment of its structural transformation," *Revista Brasileira de Politica Internacional* 63(2), 1-22, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202000201.

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights the fact that the "mutual benefit" orientation of Chinese South-South cooperation does not correspond with Western specifications and drops a clarifying comment on its website:

> China's foreign aid differs in several aspects from official development assistance provided by members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, as China openly affirms that its development assistance is for mutual benefit, including China's own commercial benefit.[9]

Since the European Union is represented in the OECD Development Assistance Committee and most EU member states are OECD donor countries, the growing Chinese influence in South-South cooperation has led to a new space of encounter between Europe and the People's Republic in the sphere of development aid. In the third part of this publication, the challenges and perspectives of this encounter at various geographical locations will be examined in more detail.

Viewing the opportunity of "mutual commercial benefit" in other developing countries, Chinese companies have been displaying a remarkable readiness to invest abroad during recent years. The question arises to what extent the – partly state-owned – corporate sector is following the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) guidelines when investing in South-South partner countries. An international study examined the reporting practice of larger, stock exchange listed Chinese companies and came to the conclusion that the implementation of the SDGs does not appear to be embedded in their business strategies and goals:

> Based on our research, we can safely conclude that in the case of China, the SDGs have gained significance as far as reporting mechanism is concerned, but there is still a long way to go when it comes to incorporating these into the strategic objectives of Chinese companies, and there is a lack of tangible evidence related to their adoption implementation as part of companies' overall objectives.[10]

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[9] OECD, Development Cooperation Profiles 2020, China (People's Republic of), https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/18b00a44-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/18b00a44-en#section-d1e45840.

[10] Siming Yu/Muhammad S. Sial/Dang Khoa Tran/Alina Badulescu/Phung Anh Thu (August 4, 2020), "Adoption and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in China – Agenda 2030," *mdpi*, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/15/6288/pdf; the research sample consisted of 100 companies, listed in the Shanghai Stock Exchange from 2016 to 2018.

The anti-hegemonic narrative

What are the inherent costs of the anti-hegemonic narrative? Which implications arise for Beijing from this narrative under the obligation to avoid hegemonic performance as a "responsible" major power? Are there recent showcases on the international stage that indicate maneuvering? These are the questions to be discussed as follows.

As already mentioned, the official PRC narrative of anti-hegemonism dates back to the Bandung Conference of 1955. Hence, the leadership of the People's Republic can draw on the diplomatic continuity and experience of more than half a decade to uphold and foster its role as anti-hegemonic power. The supporting main pillar of the anti-hegemonic stance, i.e., non-interference in each other's internal affairs, ranks fourth among the Ten Principles of Bandung.

Interference in the internal affairs of other states presupposes the status of power. Until the post-Deng Xiaoping era, the PR China was hardly in a position to exert leverage through interference on the global stage, with the exception of neighbouring countries.

As for neighbouring countries, at the very beginning of the Deng Xiaoping era, Beijing set a blunt example of regional hegemonism by a massive punitive military offensive against Vietnam launched on February 17, 1979.[11] Later on, the offensive was officially labelled a "self-defence counterattack against Vietnam" (对越自卫反击战, Dui Yue ziwei fanji zhan), based on the justification of prior skirmishes along the Sino-Vietnamese borderline.

As a matter of fact, this punitive campaign of the late 70ies constituted a clear violation of the normative framework of anti-hegemonism, since the

[11] On February 17, 1979, more than 300,000 Chinese ground troops crossed into northern Vietnam and captured several cities. On March 6, 1979, China declared that the punitive mission of the PLA forces had been achieved and withdrew from Vietnam. At Southeast Asian regional level, China was aiming to punish Vietnam for its invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 to oust the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge. By January 7, 1979, Vietnamese forces had entered Phnom Penh with Soviet support and the Khmer Rouge leadership had fled to western Cambodia. Beijing's strategic goal to drive out Vietnamese insurgents from Cambodia did not materialize.

actual objective was not to gain territory but to enforce a radical change in Vietnamese foreign policy decision-making. It was bone-hard power interference, intended to stop the welcome culture of the Hanoi regime for Soviet support and to contain the perceived "encirclement" strategy by Moscow.

A study on the legal justification of the Chinese military offensive against Vietnam comes to the conclusion that "the Chinese incursion of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was a systematic abuse of Chinese hegemonic power, used symbolically to denote superiority and influence."[12]

Even though the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has gained enormously in terms of capacity and technological level since the turn of the millennium, no similar large-scale hard power undertaking against neighbouring states has been launched during the last 42 years.

Yet, in the run of the last decade the nine-dash-line in the South China Sea, introduced by the Kuomindang government in 1947,[13] has increasingly given rise to accusations of hegemonistic hardpower performance at sea. It is a well-known fact that Beijing vehemently opposes this blame, arguing that the offshore waters and islands within the nine-dash-linefall under China's "indisputable sovereignty." The governments of the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia and Indonesia regularly brand Beijing's insistence as regional hegemonism because the Chinese claims are at numerous locations restricting the outreach of their Exclusive Economic Zones.

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[12] Matt McDonald (2016), "The Law and Politics of a Norm Violation: Punitivity and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979," *Amsterdam Law Forum* (Vol.8/2), 39, https://amsterdamlawforum.org/articles/abstract/10.37974/ALF.284/.

[13] The nine-dash line was originally an 11-dash line developed by the Chinese geographer Yang Huairen (1917-2009) employed by the Nationalist Kuomintang government. In 1949, when the Kuomintang relocated to Taiwan, Yang stayed on the mainland and was persecuted during the Proletarian Cultural Revolution as an "anti-revolutionary academic authority." In 1952, Zhou Enlai gave up China's claim over the Gulf of Tonkin and handed maritime sovereignty of the bay over to Vietnam, thereby removing two of the 11 South China Sea dashes.

After the UNCLOS arbitral court decision of July 2016 against Chinese claims based on the nine-dash-line[14] the European Union and major European countries have been showing reluctance to get involved in a regional issue of dispute in the Asian Pacific. But since August 2019, the EU has been addressing China on several occasions to adhere to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and several major EU member states are increasingly engaging in naval operations in South China Sea waters.[15]

At this point, the South China Sea dispute was only touched in brief to identify a current maneuvering in the international arena at odds with Beijing's anti hegemonism narrative. The third part of this volume will elaborate in more detail on the inclusion of East Asia and Southeast Asia in the eurostrategic orbiter.

Returning to the initial question, which antagonisms in real politics are connected to China's anti-hegemonism narrative, the increasingly heated human rights debate should not be omitted.

In democratic countries, the human rights debate in relation to the PR China is referred to almost exclusively in the context of systemic rivalry. Whereas Beijing is projecting its concept of universal human rights in various international fora as a strategic field of action in the theoretical framework of anti-hegemonism.

According to the Chinese point of view, the normative hegemonism of Western industrialized countries is reflected in the inappropriate, hence unjust, ranking of socio-economic human rights. Beijing's argumentation reads that for humans living in the global South the category of civil and

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[14] See: United Nations (2017), The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People's Republic of China), 12, July 2016, *Law of the Sea*, No.91, 28, https://www.un.org/depts/los/doalos_publications/LOSBulletins/bulletinpdf/LOS_91_WEB.pdf.

[15] On August 29, 2019, Germany, France and the UK expressed in a joint statement their countries' concern about the situation in the South China Sea and their support for the application of UNCLOS. The South China Sea security situation was also addressed during the EU-China Summit of September 2019; for further details see also Nicola Casarini (2020), "Rising to the Challenge: Europe's Security Policy in East Asia amid US-China Rivalry," *The International Spectator*, 55/1, 78-92, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/casarini.pdf.

political rights is secondary in comparison to human rights concerning livelihood. However, in order not to fundamentally call the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into question, the Chinese view is usually toned down in official documents to the effect that socio-cultural and cultural rights are to be equal to political rights.

The joint declaration adopted by the South-South Human Rights Forum held in Beijing in 2017 includes a change in the ranking of basic human rights. According to Article III "the right to subsistence and the right to development are the primary basic human rights."[16] Article IV defines the relationship between political – democratically oriented – rights and livelihood rights: "The acquisition of civil and political rights is inseparable from the simultaneous acquisition of economic, social and cultural rights, which are equally important and interrelated."[17]

Not only at United Nations level this approach on human rights has caused a major divide between the developed North and developing countries in the global South. It is exactly in this context that Beijing considers its mission as an anti-hegemonic actor against the normative supremacy of the North partly fulfilled. In this vein, the cleavage between the European human rights convention and the People's Republic's human rights concept has to be considered a multidimensional issue. The aspect of systemic rivalry covers just one dimension.

China's days as the largest developing country are most probably counted, and likewise might the anti-hegemonism narrative come to an end during upcoming years. Recent diplomatic and economic sanctions at bilateral level convey the image of a "New China:" A rising major power, inclined to pick up a hegemonic orientation, instead of continuing a strict anti-hegemonic stance. By having declared a "New Era" at national policy level, Beijing might have prepared a smart maneuvering move for the international community as well.

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[16] China Daily, December 8, 2017, Full Text of Beijing Declaration adopted by the First South-South Human Rights Forum, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201712/08/WS5a2aaa68a310eefe3e99ef85.html.

[17] Ibid.

The Health Silk Road narrative

Barbara Farkas has outlined that China's ambitions in the global health sector are closely connected to the objective of enhancing the reputation as a responsible major power and to gain support for its international positioning. It was further stated that Beijing has been striving to expand its discourse power in the global health sector for several years and that since 2017, the narrative of the "Health Silk Road" has constituted a strategic core component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In Farkas' contribution it was rolled out in detail that the global spread of Covid-19 has significantly upgraded the current importance of the Health Silk Road narrative.

What are the geopolitical implications of this narrative and its inherent costs? What about the high expectations of most BRI-partner countries? Can Beijing meet these expectations without maneuvering?

Since the end of 2020, China's pandemic crisis management assistance, delivered to the outside world and initially labelled "mask diplomacy," has given way to a new label: "vaccine diplomacy." PR China state authorities and state media hardly miss an opportunity to protest against this labelling:

> Beijing, on its part, has promised to make Chinese-made vaccines a global public good and ensure developing and least-developed countries can afford to pay for them. But some Western politicians and media have distorted facts and misinterpreted China's intentions to claim it is indulging in "vaccine diplomacy" to extend its regional and global influence.[18]

Up until June 2021, China has provided vaccine donations to more than 80 countries and exported vaccines to another 40 states.[19] This ratio immediately raises the question: Which criteria are used to decide about the volume of free-of-charge shipments for specific countries and how about the prizing in the frame of regular export shipments of Chinese vaccines?

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[18] Yinglian Hu, "China's vaccines are global public good," *China Daily*, April 28, 2021, https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/28/WS60889a0ba31024ad0babad4d.html.

[19] Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on June 2, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1880861.shtml.

Beijing argues that in the first place socio-economic indicators are decisive, when it comes to the vaccine distribution modus for BRI partner countries. However, a closer look reveals that realpolitik considerations obviously take precedence over socio-economic factors. The cases of Bangladesh and Pakistan support this observation.

Bangladesh signed a deal with India in December 2020 to purchase 30 million doses of the Astra Zeneca vaccine priced at 5 USD per dose. Further, Bangladesh received 2 million doses of the vaccine as a donation from India. Yet, in late April 2021, the Indian government stopped exporting the vaccine due to an unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases and the subsequent rise in domestic demand for the vaccine. At that time, Bangladesh had received only 7 million doses of Astra Zeneca, less than 25% of the agreed purchase with India.

As an emergency solution, the Bangladesh government approved in a government-to-government deal of late May 2021 the purchase of 15 million Sinopharm doses from China, priced at 10 USD per dose. Hence, the Sinopharm vaccine cost Bangladesh double the AstraZeneca vaccine from the producer Serum India in India.[20]

Apart from the purchase agreement, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced the provision of 600,000 more vaccine doses to Bangladesh as a second batch of gift, in addition to 500,000 Sinopharm doses already delivered as gift on May 12, 2021, adding up the Chinese free-of-charge donation for Dhaka to 1.1 million doses, which is still far below the Indian vaccine donation of 2 million doses.[21] On the other hand, the erroneously published purchase price at 10 USD per dose was far below the prize the vaccine was sold to some ASEAN countries and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's

[20] Business Standard, May 29, 2021, "Chinese vaccine to cost Bangladesh double of India's Oxford AstraZeneca," https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/chinese-vaccine-to-cost-bangladesh-double-of-india-s-oxford-astrazeneca-121052900820_1.html.

[21] Dhaka Tribune, May 25, 2021, "Momen: Bangladesh will buy 15 mio doses of Covid vaccine from China," https://www.dhakatribune.com/health/coronavirus/2021/05/25/covid-19-bangladesh-to-buy-15-million-doses-of-vaccine-from-china.

immediate protest caused diplomatic upset and put Beijing in a difficult position.[22]

The case of Bangladesh makes it clear that China has reserved a certain amount of political leeway in setting the sales price of vaccines and knows how to use this leeway in pragmatic terms, irrespective of socio-economic factors.

That under the flagship of the Health Silk Road geopolitical considerations factor very heavily into vaccine distribution is only further illustrated by Pakistan. According to a World Bank categorization, Pakistan is on track to be moved out of the UN Least Developed Countries list by 2026, with Bangladesh included in the same category. Following the logic of strengthening the health systems of the global South, both countries should be equally supported. However, Bangladesh plays a minor role as a Belt & Road Initiative country, whereas Pakistan has been a strategic BRI partner since 2013 within the ambitious flagship project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Hence, economic and geostrategic interests play a certain role in the allocation of Chinese vaccine aid in the framework of bilateral partnerships. In the case of Pakistan, Beijing makes no secret of the priority status of its - de facto - close political ally. The state-run Xinhua agency elaborates in April 2021:

> Pakistan is not only the first country in the world that the Chinese government provided Covid-19 vaccine aid to, but also the country that has received the largest number of China-donated Covid-19 vaccines so far, which is a vivid manifestation of the ironclad friendship between the two countries.[23]

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[22] The Daily Star, June 5, 2021, "China annoyed that prize of Sinopharm was publicized by Bangladesh: Foreign Minister," https://www.thedailystar.net/coronavirus-deadly-new-threat/news/china-annoyed-price-sinopharm-was-publicised-bangladesh-foreign-minister-2105065; The Times of India, June 1, 2021, "Expensive Chinese vaccines stir hornet's nest in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka," https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/expensive-chinese-vaccines-stir-hornets-nest-in-bangladesh-sri-lanka/articleshow/83138927.cms.

[23] Xinhua, April 27, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/27/c_139908100.htm.

In March 2021, Pakistan signed an agreement with Cansino Bio in late March to import a concentrate of the vaccine to process and package the vaccine locally. In April 2021, technology for vaccine production was transferred from Beijing to Islamabad. In early June 2021, Pakistan started producing the CanSino Covid-19 vaccine with the help of China under the product name PakVac.[24]

It is worth noting that it had taken Beijing no more than three months to get local vaccine production up and running in a BRI partner country with a deficient health system. At the opening ceremony of the production site in Islamabad, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan explained, "Our cooperation not only effectively contributes to Pakistan's efforts in fighting against the Covid-19 […], it reduces its dependence of the vaccine import."[25]

The conclusion in the case of Pakistan may be that those countries that can invoke "ironclad friendship" with the People's Republic are preferentially helped to free themselves from dependence on vaccine imports from abroad. Besides the start-up of local vaccine production Pakistan received 3.5 million doses of free-of-charge vaccine in four batches from China within the first half of 2021.[26]

The examples of Bangladesh and Pakistan were used to illustrate China's maneuvering freedoms in the sphere of bilateral arrangements. At the multilateral level, the picture is somewhat different. In multilateral institutions like the World Health Organization and multilateral mechanisms like COVAX, the People's Republic has to carry the inherent cost of its "Health Silk Road" narrative without exception. Here, China's leverage and maneuvering space appears rather limited. All participating economies have equal access to a public portfolio of vaccines, are required to commit to legally binding agreements and have to make upfront payments to the COVAX facility.

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[24] See Reuters, June 4, 2021, "Pakistan produces Chinese Can Sino Bio COVID vaccine, brands it PakVac," https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-produces-chinese-cansinobio-covid-vaccine-brands-it-pakvac-2021-06-04/.

[25] Ibid.

[26] The Hindu, June 23, 2021, "Pakistan receives another 2 million doses of China-made Covid vaccine," https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-receives-another-2-million-doses-of-china-made-covid-vaccine/article34923552.ece.

The COVAX facility was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in tandem with the European Commission and France in April 2020. Due to this setup, the multilateral vaccine distribution mechanism COVAX offers a diplomatic convergence zone for EU member states and China. The "EU Strategy for Covid-19 vaccines" of June 2020, showcases similar intentions of a strong commitment to be a responsible major power, as do the "Health Silk Road" documents:

> The spread of the virus has shown that no region is safe until the virus is under control everywhere. In addition to it being in their clear self-interest to do so, high-income countries have a responsibility to accelerate the development and production of a safe and effective vaccine and make it accessible for all the regions of the world. The EU recognises this task as its responsibility.[27]

Yet, the converging interests of major vaccine donors in the service of humanism will show little effect if UN structures and other relevant global institutions are dominated by a bipolar divide at the geopolitical level.[28]

Given this assumption, a strong geostrategic positioning of the European Union as an autonomous counterweight to purely bipolar alignments seems crucial.

The European Union is not alone in facing this strategic challenge. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with its ten member states[29] is struggling in another context to escape the growing bipolar power logic in the Asia-Pacific region. At the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting of April 24, 2021, the chairman's statement summarizes under point 5 the current efforts of consolidation:

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[27] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament the European Council, the Council and the European Investment Bank, June 17, 2020, "EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines," https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0245&from=EN.

[28] The WHO gave emergency approval to Covid-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna before the approval of the Chinese SinoPharm vaccine on May 9, 2021. For the first time the WHO has given emergency use approval to a Chinese vaccine for any infectious disease. The Chinese vaccine is now included in COVAX, which has hit serious supply problems with Western vaccines.

[29] ASEAN member states: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

> We underscored the importance of further strengthening ASEAN centrality and unity in our engagement with ASEAN's external partners through ASEAN-led mechanisms in order to build mutual trust and confidence as well as to reinforce an open, transparent, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the centre. In this regard, we instructed the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to hold their meetings with the People's Republic of China and the United States as soon as possible, prior to the 54th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting.[30]

The expression "strengthening ASEAN centrality and unity" carries, among other things, the restrained but clear message that ASEAN states do not want to see themselves as pawns in either anti-Chinese alliances or anti-US initiatives. As regards public health policy and the purchase of Covid-19 vaccines in particular, the Southeast Asian countries have been practising on full purpose a diversification policy line since 2020.

According to an annual survey by the ASEAN Studies Centre at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute,[31] a majority (53.8%) of the 1,023 respondents, when asked how ASEAN should best respond to Beijing and Washington's power competing ambitions in the region, prefer to have ASEAN enhance its own resilience and unity to fend off pressure. The fear that ASEAN is becoming an arena of competition among major powers and its members may become their proxies rank as a main concern for 69.1% of the respondents.

It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that the geopolitical interests of the European Union and ASEAN coincide in relevant aspects, although the majority of ASEAN member states are still developing countries. At present, Southeast Asia does not occupy the position of one of the EU's geostrategic key regions. But taking into account the recent dynamics of Europe's China strategy, this situation may change rapidly.

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[30] Chairman's Statement on the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, April 24, 2021, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, https://asean.org/storage/Chairmans-Statement-on-ALM-Five-Point-Consensus-24-April-2021-FINAL-a-1.pdf.

[31] Sharon Seah/Thi Hoang/Melinda Martinus/Thi Pham (2021), "The State of Southeast Asia: 2021 Survey Report," *ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute*, 2, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf.

Part II

China's Presence in Geographical and Digital Space

Serbia – China's Preferred Partner in the Western Balkans

Predrag Jureković

GR.Stocks/Shutterstock.com

Introductory words

For China's geo-economic interests within the framework of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the "17+1" initiative launched in 2012 plays an important role with regard to Europe. The idea behind the initiative is that by using this political platform, China can intensify its economic and trade relations with the Central, East and Southeast European states and, in particular, better implement its economic interests vis-à-vis the richer Western European states as well by investing in regional transport infrastructure. All Western

Balkan states[1] – with the exception of Kosovo – participate in the "17+1" initiative and have a considerable interest in Chinese investments.

However, the most populous Western Balkan state, Serbia, clearly stands out in this region in terms of its relations with China. Of all Western Balkan and probably (with the exception of Russia) of all European states Serbia has the most intensive political relations with China. Shared anti-Western narratives, which originate from the NATO operation during the Kosovo War, as well as China's successful "Corona diplomacy", are highly conducive to this. Furthermore, Serbia, whose capital was the venue of a "17+1" summit in 2014, has become the main focus of China's investments and loans in the Western Balkans, as well as a hub for Chinese economic ambitions towards Serbia's neighbouring countries.

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate how Serbia's special status as China's most important partner in Southeast Europe is reflected in its economic, political, security and cultural relations. In this context, however, Sino-Serbian relations are also critically assessed in terms of how they should be evaluated with regard to Serbia's EU accession ambitions and how they could affect the democratic consolidation of this key state in the Western Balkans.

Intensified economic relations

In the context of China's growing geoeconomic ambitions in Europe and the thus upgraded geopolitical position of the Western Balkans, economic exchanges with Serbia have increased sharply in the period 2010 – 2020. According to calculations by Serbian economists, imports from China doubled in 2019 compared to 2010, while exports to China were 45 times the 2010 level. Overall, however, exports from Serbia to China remain at a very low level.[2] This is mainly due to the – from a Chinese perspective – still poorly developed manufacturing sector in Serbia. In 2020, China already

[1] The Western Balkans includes the following six states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

[2] Elena Jovičić, Slavica Stevanović, and Isidora Beraha, "Serbia-China Bilateral Trade Relations: Major Challenges and Opportunities," *Economic Analysis: Applied Research in Emerging Markets* 53, no. 2 (December 2020): 133-144 (here 133), https://doi.org/10.28934/ea.20.53.2.pp133-144.

ranked second behind Germany in terms of imports. In terms of Serbian exports, however, China continues to rank at the bottom of the list of industrialised nations. Serbia also has the largest deficit in its trade balance with the ambitious Asian economic power.[3]

In addition to agricultural products, China imports copper from Serbia. Copper already accounted for more than 80% of Serbia's total exports to China in 2019.[4] A year earlier, in 2018, the Chinese firm Zijing Mining acquired a majority stake in Serbia's RTB Bor copper production facility for USD 1.26 billion, making it one of the key Chinese investments in Serbia and the region as a whole to date.[5] Serbia, on the other hand, imports mainly high-tech devices and appliances for household use from China and has increased imports of medical items due to the Corona pandemic since 2020.[6] Despite the noticeable intensification of trade relations between China and Serbia, the European Union (EU) as an economic community remains the most important trading partner of Serbia and the entire Western Balkans. About 60% of imports to Serbia come from the EU. The share of Serbian exports to the EU is almost 70%.[7]

When it comes to infrastructure investments in Serbia and the entire Western Balkans, the EU competes even more fiercely with China. According to the calculations of the "Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies" (WIIW), the EU supported investments in infrastructure projects worth approximately €18 billion across the region in the period 2009 – 2018 through more than €1 billion in cash donations and more than €5 billion in loans.[8] In comparison, Chinese banks provided a total of almost €9 billion in construction loans to the Western Balkan countries in 2010 – 2019, according to WIIW calculations. Unlike with the EU, however, there are no

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3 Ibid., 136-137.

4 Ibid., 138.

5 Jens Bastian, "Southeast Europe in Current Chinese Foreign Economic Policy," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 60, no. 3 (2020): 13-28 (here: 20).

6 Jovičić, Stevanović, and Beraha, "Serbia-China," 137-138.

7 Mario Holzner, "Economic Development, Infrastructure Projects, Foreign Trade and Investment in the Western Balkans," in *Competing External Influences in South East Europe – Implications for Regional Consolidation*, ed. Predrag Jureković (Vienna: Study Group Information, 2019): 119-129 (here 125-126).

8 Ibid., 120.

cash donations in Chinese investments.[9] According to official Serbian data from the end of 2019, Chinese loans and investments amounted to USD 7 billion by then, with loans and investments each accounting for about half. The share of Serbia's gross domestic product was 15%.[10] Some Serbian experts even estimated Beijing's investments in Serbia at 9 – 10 billion euros at the end of 2019.[11]

The majority of Chinese investments are in transport and energy projects, with Serbia in the Western Balkans being the main target country. Even before the takeover of the copper mine in Bor, the Chinese company "Hebei Iron and Steel Group" (HBIS) bought the then loss-making ironworks in Smederevo in 2016.[12] For economist Jens Bastian, who has been analysing Chinese investments in Southeast Europe for some time, investments in ore mining sites in the Western Balkans are intended to strengthen supply chains for Chinese industrial production, especially in car manufacturing.[13]

Among Chinese investments in heavy industry, ecologically damaging energy projects have provoked criticism at both regional and European levels. For example, in 2014 the Serbian government received a loan of USD 608 million from a Chinese state bank for the expansion of the lignite-fired thermal power plant in Kostolac. The power plant does not meet modern environmental standards.[14] In the western Serbian town of Zrenjanin, a Chinese car tyre factory has drawn criticism from environmentalists for deteriorating air and water quality.[15] Because of that and similar instances,

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9 Ibid., 122-124.

10 Aleksandra Nenadović, "Kineski krediti pod senkom korupcije (Chinese loans in the shadow of corruption)," *glasamerike.net*, November 6, 2019, https://www.glasamerike.net/a/kineski-krediti-pod-senkom-korupcije-/5155036.html.

11 Alexander Strelkov, "Sources, Tools and Impact of External Non-EU-Engagement in Southeastern Europe – Part III: CHINA (conference report)," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 60, no. 3 (2020): 63-74 (here 67).

12 Nenadović, "Kineski krediti".

13 Bastian, "Southeast Europe," 21.

14 Danas online, "Kineski kredit za TE Kostolac, pa i kineski zakoni (Chinese loans for the Kostolac thermal power plant, but also Chinese laws)," *Danas*, July 21, 2016, https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/kineski-kredit-za-te-kostolac-pa-i-kineski-zakoni/.

15 Slobodna Vojvodina online, "Zrenjanin je ekološka bomba koja otkucava (Zrenjanin is a ticking ecological bomb)," *Slobodna Vojvodina*, August 26, 2020, https://www.slobodnavojvodina.rs/slobodna-vojvodina/zrenjanin-je-ekoloska-bomba-koja-otkucava/.

EU parliamentarians have accused the Serbian government and Chinese investors of violating both Serbian and EU laws with heavy industry projects.[16] Criticism is levelled at the lack of public transparency in the contents of contracts, the violation of Serbian laws relating to tenders and the lack of impulses for the Serbian economy, as Chinese construction companies mainly use Chinese workers and construction materials from China.[17] In a nutshell, the criticism is that the Serbian government takes out loans from Chinese state banks at partly unfavourable and non-transparent conditions in order to finance prestigious infrastructure projects that mainly support China's "Belt and Road Initiative".

These accusations make no impression on the Serbian government and President Aleksandar Vučić, whom the political opposition accuses of an increasingly authoritarian course. Through the media, which are controlled by the ruling "Serbian Progressive Party" (SNP) and Vučić, the motorway sections, bridges and repaired railway lines financed with Chinese loans and built by Chinese construction companies are successfully staged for propaganda purposes.[18] In this context, the Chinese financing of the planned modernisation of the Belgrade-Budapest railway line functions as a central propaganda theme. The relevant agreement between China and Serbia was concluded in July 2019. The 107-kilometre section of the line in Serbia will

[16] Marijana Avakumović, "Evroposlanici zabrinuti zbog kineskih investicija (Europarliamentarians concerned about Chinese investments)," *Politika*, January 1, 2021, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/471643/Evroposlanici-zabrinuti-zbog-kineskih-investicija.

[17] Heather A. Conley, Jonathan E. Hillman, Maesea McCalpin, and Donatienne Ruy, "Becoming a Chinese Client State, The Case of Serbia," *CSIS Report*, (Sept. 2020): 8-9, https://www.csis.org/analysis/becoming-chinese-client-state-case-serbia; Telegraf.rs, "Kineski radnici rade na najvećim projektima u Srbiji - kako dalje zbog koronavirusa? (Chinese workers are working on the biggest projects in Serbia - what will happen in view of the Corona virus?)," *Telegraf*, February 20, 2020, https://biznis.telegraf.rs/info-biz/3156490-kineski-radnici-rade-na-najvecim-projektima-u-srbiji-kako-dalje-zbog-koronavirusa.

[18] Danas online, "Vučić: Srbija najbolji prijatelj Kine u Evropi (Vučić: Serbia China's best friend in Europe)," *Danas,* November 7, 2020, https://www.danas.rs/politika/vucic-srbija-najbolji-prijatelj-kine-u-evropi/.

be financed with a Chinese loan in the amount of USD 943 million.[19] Unlike EU investments, which must be made in accordance with the law and in a transparent manner, the Chinese investments are suspected of being more in line with corrupt and patronage interests of political interest groups in Serbia.[20]

The EU is not categorically opposed to Chinese investments in the candidate country Serbia but demands that these must comply with EU guidelines and be compatible with EU projects in the Western Balkans.[21] The latter refers, among other things, to the EU's connectivity agenda for the Western Balkans. The EU has allocated about 1 billion euros for this purpose in the period 2015-20. With this financial support, several dozen infrastructure projects worth 4 billion euros are to be realised, which are of interest to both the Western Balkan states and the EU.[22] The main aim is to connect the Western Balkans to the trans-European networks and to strengthen the cooperation of the Western Balkan states within the framework of the "European Energy Community". In particular, China's energy projects are viewed very critically by Brussels, especially for ecological reasons.[23]

However, the Serbian government sees China as an important partner for the digitalisation of its country. For example, plans were launched by the two states in 2019 to build a regional platform for artificial intelligence in the central Serbian city of Kragujevac by 2025. The leading Chinese provider of information and communication technology, HUAWEI, is to play a key role in this context. This global corporation has its regional headquarters in Belgrade and could use Serbia as a hub to spread its technology throughout

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19 Iva Martinović, "Svi rokovi brze pruge Beograd – Budimpešta (All deadlines of the fast track Belgrade-Budapest)," *Radio Slobodna Evropa (online)*, January 23, 2020, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rekonstrucija-pruga-beograd-budimpesta/30392693.html.

20 Conley, Hillman, McCalpin, and Ruy, "Becoming a Chinese Client," 7.

21 Ana Krstinovska, "The 17+1 Cooperation Platform: Between Wishes and Reality," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 60, no. 3 (2020): 29-34 (here 33).

22 European Commission, "EU - Western Balkans. Boosting Connectivity," July, 2019. https://wbc-rti.info/object/document/19891.

23 SEE Energy News, "Energy sector in the Western Balkans and its connection to China," *SEE Energy News*, November 4, 2020, https://serbia-energy.eu/energy-sector-in-the-western-balkans-and-its-connection-to-china/.

the Western Balkans.[24] The latter is viewed very critically, especially in the USA and in parts of the EU, for political and security reasons (see the chapter "Security cooperation").

Less controversial in the context of China's soft power policy in the Western Balkans is the expansion of tourist activities by Chinese citizens. Serbia is one of the Chinese government's particularly "recommended travel destinations".[25] Chinese tourists do not need an entry visa to Serbia, a fact that has certainly increased the attractiveness of the Western Balkan state as a travel destination. In 2017-18, for example, the number of Chinese tourists doubled, reaching over 100,000[26], and in 2019, the Chinese were the largest tourist group in Serbia with around 145,000 tourists. In terms of overnight stays, Chinese tourists were second only to Bosnian Herzegovinians with 268,572 overnight stays in the same year.[27] The growing popularity of Serbia as a destination for Chinese travel-hungry tourists was also shown in 2020 by an explicit recommendation of the Chinese National Tourism Organisation, which ranked Serbia among the ten best winter destinations in the world.[28]

"China's most reliable partner in Europe" – the political dimension

In a representative opinion poll published by the "Belgrade Centre for Security Policy" in November 2020, Serbian citizens were asked about their attitudes towards international actors. In the survey, 40% of the respondents named Serbia's traditional ally Russia as the country's "biggest friend",

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[24] Politika online, "Softverska platforma za veštačku inteligenciju 'Huaveja' stiže u Kragujevac (HUAWEI's artificial intelligence software platform arrives in Kragujevac)," *Politika*, November 5, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/441276/Ekonomija/Softverska-platforma-za-vestacku-inteligenciju-Huaveja-stize-u-Kragujevac.

[25] Nevenka Čavlek, "Chinese Outbound Tourism to Central, Eastern and Southeast European Countries," Südosteuropa Mitteilungen 60, no. 3 (2020): 51-60 (here 58).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Politika online, "Kinezi i Bosanci najbrojniji turisti u Srbiji (Chinese and Bosnians the most frequent tourists in Serbia)," *Politika*, February 11, 2020, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/447665/Kinezi-i-Bosanci-najbrojniji-turisti-u-Srbiji.

[28] Politika online, "Srbija za Kineze medju 10 najboljih zimskih destinacija (Serbia among the top ten winter destinations for China)," *Politika*, March 2, 2020, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/449029/Ekonomija/Srbija-za-Kineze-medu-10-najboljih-zimskih-destinacija.

followed by the "new brother" China, which was named as "best friend" by as many as 16%. Neighbouring countries of Serbia and EU member states had much lower approval ratings. Only 46% of Serbs still supported EU accession, 51% explicitly rejected it at the time of the survey. In contrast, 87% of respondents rated China's role in Serbia as positive (53% in 2017). Despite Serbia's official EU accession ambitions, as many as 57% thought Serbia should coordinate its foreign policy with Russia and China.[29]

The facts that more people in Serbia have a negative opinion about the EU and EU accession and that authoritarian partner states such as China are upgraded at the same time, can be attributed to various domestic and foreign policy factors. Firstly, to anti-democratic developments in Serbia itself, which have increased sharply since President Aleksandar Vučić's "Serbian Progressive Party" (SNP) came to power in 2012. Out of "pragmatic necessity", EU accession is indeed the declared strategic goal also for the SNP-led governments. At the same time, however, they reject too much interference by Brussels in Serbia's internal affairs and especially in Belgrade's foreign policy. Officially, Belgrade strives for a balanced good relationship with all important geopolitical actors. In reality, however, Serbian government politicians and the media they control portray authoritarian states such as Russia and China exclusively positively and as partner countries, while the EU is judged neutrally at best and its far-reaching support for Serbia is hardly communicated to its own population. This ambivalent European integration policy of the current Serbian leadership (EU accession negotiations with simultaneous undermining of the EU image by the media) leads to distortions of reality in public opinion about international actors.[30]

For example, a representative survey published by the Serbian Ministry for European Integration in December 2019 showed that the EU and China are erroneously perceived as similar by the Serbian population when it comes to non-repayable financial donations to Serbia. Accordingly, 20% of

[29] Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, "Mnoga lica srpske spoljne politike. Javno mnjenje I geopolitičko balansiranje (The many faces of Serbian foreign policy. Public opinion and geopolitical balancing)," November 2020, https://bezbednost.org/publikacija/mnoga-lica-srpske-spoljne-politike-javno-mnjenje-i-geopoliticko-balansiranje/.

[30] Observations of the author in the course of many years of continuous analysis of Serbian media.

respondents thought that China was the biggest donor state, while 26% thought that the EU was.[31] However, the figures published by the Ministry for European Integration for the period 2000 – 2016 showed that the EU, with 2.96 billion euros in support funds, provided 59.9% of the total international support funds, while the Chinese share in the said period was only 31.4 million euros or 0.6%.[32]

These misperceptions are partly due to the EU's weakening credibility in its integration policy towards the Western Balkans since 2010. The poor public opinion in Serbia highlights weaknesses in the EU's strategic communication. In addition, although anti-democratic tendencies in Serbia and other Western Balkan states are criticised in EU progress reports, Brussels does not exert any significant political pressure on the governments to reinforce democratic standards in the Western Balkans.[33] In the context of this grey zone in terms of democracy and integration policy, in which Serbia and the other Western Balkan states still find themselves, it is not surprising that China is able to pursue a very successful soft power policy in this part of Southeast Europe with only a small investment of funds. In particular, the Corona crisis in 2020/21 gave an additional boost to China's foreign policy towards the Western Balkans and Serbia in particular.

In the first phase of the pandemic, in March 2020, when the European states seemed hopelessly overwhelmed in their Corona crisis management, China supplied medical protective equipment and devices to Serbia, among others. Belgrade returned the favour with huge billboards thanking "Brother Xi" (Chinese President Xi Jinping) for his swift assistance.[34] The medical team of

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31 Republic of Serbia – Ministry of European Integration, "European Orientation of Serbian Citizens. Public Opinion Poll," December 2019, 24, https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/information/public-opinion/.

32 Ibid., 25.

33 Marko Kmezić and Florian Bieber, eds., *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion* (BiEPAG Policy Study, March 2017), https://www.balkanfund.org/biepag-publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-an-anatomy-of-stabilitocracy-and-the-limits-of-eu-democracy-promotion.

34 Sanja Kljajić, Srbija: "EU pomaže više, ali je Kina bratska (Serbia: EU supports more, but China is brotherly)," *Deutsche Welle* (online), April 4, 2020, https://www.dw.com/hr/srbija-eu-poma%C5%BEe-vi%C5%A1e-ali-je-kina-bratska/a-53017342.

six Chinese pandemic experts sent to Serbia received a lot of media attention. This included many appointments with Serbian ministers and President Vučić.[35] Serbian politicians went out of their way to express their thanks to the Chinese leadership, while at the same time the Serbian president strongly criticised the EU for its hesitancy in assisting Serbia after the pandemic spread.[36]

A comprehensive €3.3 billion Corona financial package for the Western Balkans agreed by the EU at the end of April 2020 put an end to the anti-EU rhetoric of Serbian leaders for the time being.[37] In public statements, however, they continued the political narrative of China as Serbia's most important partner in the Corona crisis. China's successful Corona diplomacy scored a new success in the first quarter of 2021. Serbia received special shipments of Sinopharm's vaccine from China to speed up its vaccination campaign against the Corona virus. In contrast, the EU suffered further image damage because it was unable to provide vaccine to the Western Balkan countries at this stage due to insufficient vaccine quantities in the EU itself.[38]

For Serbia, China has undoubtedly become an important foreign policy partner. Serbia in turn also sees itself as an important partner of China. Accordingly, President Vučić emphasised several times that Serbia is "China's best friend in Europe".[39] China's ambassador in Belgrade, Chen Bo, is among the diplomats most frequently and exclusively mentioned by

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35 Politika online, "Vojne spomen-medalje za drugi tim kineskih lekara (Military commemorative medals for the second team of Chinese doctors)," *Politika*, June 1, 2020, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/455247/Drustvo/Vojne-spomen-medalje-za-drugi-tim-kineskih-lekara.

36 Sofija Popović, "'Steel friendship' between Serbia and China criticised by European commentators," *European Western Balkans (EWB)*, March 30, 2020, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/30/steel-friendship-between-serbia-and-china-criticised-by-european-commentators/.

37 EWB, "EU announces €3.3 billion in support for the Western Balkans," *EWB*, April 29, 2020, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/29/eu-announces-e3-3-billion-in-support-for-western-balkans/.

38 Austrian Broadcasting Cooperation (ORF), "Impfstoffe: Freie Wahl in Serbien (Vaccines: Free choice in Serbia)," *ORF* (online), February 2, 2021, https://orf.at/stories/3200177/.

39 Danas online, "Vučić."

Serbian media in a positive context. Only with the help of its loans and related infrastructure projects, a few investments and very skilful "Corona diplomacy" has China managed to massively expand its political influence in Serbia within a few years. At the same time, China – unlike Russia – at least superficially refrains from offensive interference in Serbian domestic and foreign policy. Thus, China does not seem to have any "objections" to Serbia's EU integration. It would probably even consider Serbia's EU membership to be geo-economically advantageous for itself, since Serbia would be an advocate of China within the EU.

Politically, Beijing and Belgrade are linked above all by the common historical narrative of the "NATO aggression" during the Kosovo conflict in spring 1999. In the course of NATO air operation "Allied Force", the Chinese embassy in Belgrade became the target of a NATO attack. The communist leadership in Beijing has to this day not believed the NATO statement, which was accompanied by an apology to China, that it was an "erroneous attack".[40] Closely linked to the rejection of the 1999 NATO intervention is another common political interest of China and Serbia, namely that of mutual support for territorial integrity. China continues to regard Kosovo, which declared independence in February 2008, as a part of Serbia and acts as a reliable partner of the Serbian government in the UN Security Council.

Serbia under Vučić and his party "SNS" in turn unreservedly support Beijing's "One China" policy. Any political support for Hong Kong's or Taiwan's political concerns is ruled out by Belgrade.[41] Belgrade's political loyalty to Beijing goes so far that even in the area of human rights (Uighurs, Chinese dissidents) no criticism, not even in a slight way, has been heard

[40] Politika online, "Kineski stručnjaci odali počast stradalima u bombardovanju ambasade Kine (The Chinese experts paid tribute to the victims of the bombing of the Chinese embassy)," *Politika*, March 27, 2020, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/450966/Drustvo/Kineski-strucnjaci-odali-pocast-stradalima-u-bombardovanju-ambasade-Kine-FOTO.

[41] Politika online, "Vučić: Znam kakvu reakciju moje pismo Siju izaziva na Zapadu (Vučić: I know what reaction my letter to Xi will provoke in the West)," *Politika*, June 6, 2020, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/455580/Vucic-Znam-kakvu-reakciju-moje-pismo-Siju-izaziva-na-Zapadu.

from Belgrade of China's official policy during Vučić's term in office so far.[42] In particular, because of its foreign policy partnerships with Moscow and Beijing, Belgrade finds it increasingly difficult to coordinate its foreign policy with that of the EU, although this should actually be part of the EU integration process. Within the Western Balkans, Serbia regularly brings up the rear of all candidate and potential candidate countries when it comes to the coordination of its foreign policy with that of the EU. In 2019, according to analyses by the Belgrade-based think tank "International and Security Affairs Centre" (ISAC), the Serbian government supported only 57% of joint EU declarations on foreign policy issues.[43]

In view of Serbia's basically China-friendly policy, it is not difficult for the Chinese news agency "Xinhua", which has an office in Belgrade as well as in other Southeast European capitals, to promote China's diplomatic and economic initiatives.[44] In addition, security cooperation is also gaining in importance.

Security cooperation

The intensified cooperation between Serbia and China is not only reflected in the economic and political spheres, but also in security issues. Against this background, the USA in particular criticises extensive arms deals with China as counterproductive for Serbia's strategic goal of becoming an EU member. From a Western perspective, the purchase of six Chinese CH-92A drones, which can be used for both reconnaissance and combat purposes and were delivered by China to Serbia in July 2020, is particularly irritating in terms of security policy. Serbia is thus the first European state to have taken these unmanned military aircraft from China into use.[45] Furthermore, the military

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42 Conley, Hillman, McCalpin, and Ruy, "Becoming a Chinese Client," 6.

43 Danas online, "Srbija od svih suseda slabije usaglašava spoljnu politiku sa EU (Of all neighbouring countries, Serbia coordinates its foreign policy with the EU to a lesser extent)," *Danas*, March 9, 2020, https://www.danas.rs/politika/srbija-od-svih-suseda-slabije-usaglasava-spoljnu-politiku-sa-eu/.

44 Kurt Bassuener, "Primed Receptors: Synergies between Western Balkan Political Elites and Chinese Economic Actors and State Media," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 60, no. 3 (2020), 35-49 (here: 38).

45 Dušan Stojanović, "Serbia considers buying Chinese missiles despite US warning," *DefenseNews*, August 11, 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/08/11/serbia-considers-buying-chinese-missiles-despite-us-warning/.

cooperation between Belgrade and Beijing also foresees the upgrading of Serbian "Pegasus" drones with Chinese military technology. Serbian military experts are undergoing training in China for this purpose.[46] Conversely, officers from the Chinese Armed Forces are taking courses at the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defence Centre in Kruševac, Serbia.[47]

Visits to Belgrade by senior representatives of the Chinese Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence have become routine in Serbian-Chinese relations. Such occasions, such as the visit of the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission of China, general Zhang Youxia, in September 2019, are readily used by President Vučić to invoke the "steely friendship" between the two states and peoples. Both sides show an interest in further expanding their military relations, especially in the field of special operations forces training and cyber security.[48]

Plans by the Serbian government to rely on Chinese companies, especially HUAWEI, to expand its digital infrastructure – including the protection of sensitive personal data – are setting alarm bells ringing among Western security experts. Officially, Western representatives such as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasise that the militarily neutral Serbia can of course decide for itself with which support it expands its 5G network.[49] However, not only Western actors but also Serbian NGOs are concerned that Chinese security standards imported together with Chinese digital infrastructure could lead to a restriction of civil rights in the medium term.[50]

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46 Milan Galović, "Vojska Srbije dobila kinesku naoružanu bespilotnu letelicu CH-92A (The army of Serbia received the armed Chinese drone CH-92A)," *Politika*, November 28, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/442949/Vojska-Srbije-dobija-kinesku-naoruzanu-bespilotnu-letelicu-CH-92A.

47 Milan Galović, "Obuka kineskih oficira u Centru ABHO (Training of Chinese officers at the NBC Defence Centre)," *Politika*, May 31, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/430865/Obuka-kineskih-oficira-u-Centru-ABHO.

48 Milan Galović, "Predsednički doček za kineskog generala (Presidential reception for the Chinese general)," *Politika*, September 6, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/437337/Predsednicki-docek-za-kineskog-generala.

49 Politika online, "Stoltenberg o uticaju Kine: Srbija sama odlučuje o 5G mreži (Stoltenberg on China's influence: Serbia decides on 5G network itself)," *Politika*, November 15, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/441988/Stoltenberg-o-uticaju-Kine-Srbija-sama-odlucuje-o-5G-mrezi.

50 Strelkov, "External Non-EU-Engagement," 72.

The latter refers above all to the expansion of the Serbian cities of Novi Sad, Belgrade and Niš into so-called "safe cities", which is being pursued with Chinese surveillance technology.[51]

Joint anti-terrorism exercises by special units of the Serbian and Chinese police[52] as well as joint Serbian-Chinese police patrols in cities heavily frequented by Chinese tourists[53] further deepen Serbian-Chinese security cooperation. According to Western analyses, China is pursuing not only economic but also strategic interests with its digitalisation exports. The benefit of Serbia for China as a "regional hub" with a pivotal function vis-à-vis the other Western Balkan states but also its EU neighbours, would be obvious. This is made clear by the fact that more than two thirds of the Western Balkan projects of Chinese companies in the field of information and communication technology in recent times are directed at Serbia.[54] Only the contract between Serbian Telecom and HUAWEI for the digitalisation of Serbia is said to be worth 150 million euros, according to Serbian media reports.[55]

Cultural contacts

For China, cultural contacts are an important element of its soft power policy to attract European states to its "Belt and Road Initiative". Confucius Institutes have been present in Serbia since 2006. They are under the direct control of the Chinese Ministry of Education and its foreign policy cultural organisation "Hanban" and represent the most important instrument of Chinese cultural initiatives in Europe.[56]

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51 Svetozar Savić, "Kinesko 'tiho oružje' za Srbiju (Chinese silent weapons for Serbia)," *Deutsche Welle*, October 14, 2020, https://www.dw.com/sr/kinesko-tiho-oru%C5%BEje-za-srbiju/a-55273442.

52 Milan Galović, "Kineski super policajci u Srbiji (Chinese super policemen in Serbia)," *Politika*, November 30, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/443069/Kineski-super-policajci-u-Srbiji-FOTO.

53 Politika online, "Srpsko-kineske policijske patrole u Beogradu, Novom Sadu i Smederevu (Serbian-Chinese police patrols in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Smederevo)," *Politika*, August 1, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/434909/Hronika/Srpsko-kineske-policijske-patrole-u-Beogradu-Novom-Sadu-i-Smederevu.

54 Conley, Hillman, McCalpin, and Ruy, "Becoming a Chinese Client," 16.

55 Savić, "Kinesko tiho oružje."

56 Bastian, "Southeast Europe," 16.

The Confucius Institutes in Serbia, with locations at universities in Belgrade and Novi Sad, have the main task of spreading the Chinese language Mandarin among Serbian pupils and students. Since 2011, Mandarin has been offered as an elective subject at over sixty public schools. In some Serbian high schools with a language focus, Mandarin is taught as a compulsory first foreign language. There are plans to introduce Mandarin as an optional subject in all high schools. Particularly talented pupils and students from Serbia receive scholarships from the Hanban Centre.[57] In addition to the education sector, Chinese funding initiatives are also directed at Serbian think tanks, which are geopolitically oriented and perceived as pro-Chinese and as possible academic multipliers.[58]

Conclusion

From China's perspective, its economic, political, security and cultural engagement in Serbia is a very successful European example of the Chinese soft power strategy in the larger framework of the "Belt and Road Initiative". With Chinese loans, infrastructure projects are being built in Serbia by Chinese companies that also serve Chinese economic interests. Supplier industries for end products in China are being outsourced to this part of Southeast Europe, along with the associated environmental problems. Serbia seems to have become an important regional hub for China in the Western Balkans and in all Southeast Europe for the spread of Chinese digital infrastructure, including surveillance systems that are questionable in terms of civil liberties.

In fact, the EU's antennae should be quivering in view of the invocation of the political alliance with Beijing by government politicians of the EU candidate country Serbia. The tendency of Serbian state representatives and the media controlled by them to comment critically or even dismissively on the EU has intensified in light of the very successful Chinese and less successful EU-Corona diplomacy since 2020. In spite of all understanding

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[57] Dragana Jokić-Stamenković, "Podrška odluci da se kineski uči u gimnazijama (Support for the decision to learn Chinese at the high schools)," *Politika*, May 15, 2019, http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/429543/Drustvo/Podrska-odluci-da-se-kineski-uci-u-gimnazijama.

[58] Bastian, "Southeast Europe," 17.

for the great need for foreign direct investments (FDI) in the Western Balkans, it should not be overlooked that Chinese FDIs are partly non-transparent and add to the already extensive corruption problems in the region. In Serbia in particular, civil society organisations warn that the political weakening of the European idea and the increased influence of undemocratic geopolitical actors will increase authoritarian thinking. Statements by Serbian leaders that China as a whole is a "successful model" and Belgrade's refusal to support the EU's common foreign policy towards China and Russia seem to underpin these fears in realpolitik terms.

The fact that there has been a stronger turn towards authoritarian geopolitical actors, especially in Serbia, but also to some extent in other Western Balkan states, certainly also has to do with the loss of credibility of the EU's integration policy. This has also been accompanied by the erosion of the EU's conditionality policy over the past ten years, especially in the area of democracy policy, despite various commitments from Brussels to the "accession perspective" for the Western Balkans. "Clean investments" from China that are ecologically sound and also meet the other EU investment criteria as well as being compatible with the infrastructure projects supported by the EU in the Western Balkans – especially in the digital and energy sectors – would be good for Serbia and the entire region. Serbian special relations with China, on the other hand, particularly in the form of Belgrade's emerging deepening military and police cooperation with Beijing, represent another obstacle in the already very difficult process of consolidating the Western Balkans and its EU integration.

The Sino-Belarusian Relationship: Asymmetric and Symbolic

Christoph Bilban

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Introduction

The Sino-Belarusian relationship has gained widespread attention in Western analyses over the last years, especially since the strained Russo-Belarusian relations in late 2019. However, Minsk has become an ever-closer ally for the People's Republic of China (PRC) for more than a decade. The Republic of Belarus, therefore, is a great case study for China's expansion before and since its use of the overarching theme of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or, respectively, its non-contestation of Russia's predominant role in Eastern Europe.

The recent surge of literature on the relations between Minsk and Beijing provides an excellent basis for evaluating the actual influence of China in

Belarus and its implications for European security. Moreover, the high expectations of both partners are being confronted with geopolitical realities. However, proclaimed interest and diplomatic announcements do not necessarily translate into actual projects, as this analysis will show. Therefore, this paper outlines the development of the Chinese-Belarusian comprehensive strategic partnership in different areas of cooperation. The following four sections examine the political, economic, military and, finally, the cultural-societal sphere. The last section synthesises the findings and draws conclusions for an assessment of Sino-Belarusian relations.

Politics: the Sino-Belarusian strategic partnership falters

The 1990s and 2000s: growing attraction of the Asian vector

After becoming independent in August 1991, Minsk established diplomatic connections with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in January 1992. Already in 1995, Aljaksandr Lukashenka paid his first visit to China. In the same year, Li Peng, premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, visited Belarus in return. In 2000, the "Joint Declaration on Strengthening Comprehensive Cooperation in the 21st Century" was signed.[1] The first president of the PRC to visit Belarus was Jiang Zemin in 2001.[2] Amidst the intensifying dispute with newly elected Russian President Vladimir Putin over the development of the Russo-Belarusian Union State, China became increasingly attractive to Lukashenka in the early 2000s. Difficult relations with the EU further spurred Lukashenka to tell Xinhua in 2005: "So long as we [Belarus] develop such relations with China, we cannot be isolated."[3]

Paul Goble adds that during Lukashenka's 2005 visit to Beijing, the Chinese hosts were "impressed by his socialist commitments," making Belarus a

[1] Aliaksandr Tsikhamirau, "China as a Foreign Policy Priority of the Republic of Belarus (1992–2019) [in Russian]," *Actual problems of international relations and global development: collection of scientific papers*, no. 7 (December 30, 2019), 79, https://doi.org/10.33581/2311-9470-2019-7-71-89.

[2] Roza Turabekova, "Belarus in the Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative': The Regional Dimension [in German]," *Belarus-Analysen*, no. 45 (October 31, 2019), 2, https://doi.org/10.31205/BA.045.01.

[3] Lukashenko quoted in Temur Umarov, "In Belarus, China Is Neither at Odds With Russia nor Wedded to Lukashenko," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, September 7, 2020, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/82662; brackets in the original.

"westerly socialist beachhead."[4] Due to this ideological proximity, Minsk has been a valuable ally in China's "anti-Western (and especially anti-American) coalition" until today.[5] Wooing Beijing became a centrepiece of Belarusian multi-vector foreign policy, not least after the 2006/7 "oil and gas war" with Russia and the EU sanctions against the regime in Minsk.[6] In fact, the economic and diplomatic relationship has rapidly intensified since 2005. Belarus also began to support China on internationally disputed issues like Taiwan and Tibet.

When, due to the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the economic situation in Belarus seriously deteriorated, China stepped in and secured Belarus' economic independence for the first time. Finally, in 2009, China supported the status of the Republic of Belarus as a dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as the only non-Asian country to date. Despite such positive signals from Beijing, in the end, Lukashenka pushed the relationship forward in this phase.[7]

2010 until 2013: friends become strategic partners

The early 2010s saw new global and regional trends. First, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 heralded the return of military power as a means of the Kremlin's foreign policy. In 2009, the EU launched its Eastern Partnership, creating new conditions for a possible cooperation with the countries along the EU's eastern external border. Moreover, in 2010, the Kremlin incited a de-facto competition over Eurasian integration by creating the Customs Union, which aimed to maintain Russia's supremacy in, and exclude external actors from its Near Abroad, Turabekova argues.[8] Meanwhile, a generational change in the Chinese leadership took place in 2012/13. Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao as President of the PRC. As a

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[4] Paul Goble, "Belarus-China Cooperation Ideological as Well as Economic," *Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor 16*, no. 171 (December 10, 2019), https://jamestown.org/program/belarus-china-cooperation-ideological-as-well-as-economic/.

[5] Stefan Wolff, *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for OSCE* (Birmingham/ Hamburg/Vienna: OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, March 2021), 34, https://osce-network.net/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/China-BRI-Report-2021-fin.pdf.

[6] Umarov, "In Belarus;" Turabekova, "Belarus," 2-3.

[7] Turabekova, "Belarus," 2-3; Goble, "Belarus-China Cooperation."

[8] Turabekova, "Belarus," 4.

result, an outward looking foreign policy oriented towards economic interests replaced the previous selective cooperation with ideologically close countries like Belarus.[9]

However, as Turabekova also stresses, the common roots of the Belarusian and Chinese leadership in the Marxist-Leninist ideology continues to influence the relationship.[10] Besides, Xi and Lukashenka seem to have a close personal friendship. In 2010, then Vice-President Xi Jinping visited Belarus for the first time.[11]

During the early 2010s, Sino-Belarusian relations developed smoothly. New joint ventures of Belarusian and Chinese companies were established, an agreement on constructing a joint industrial park was reached, and cultural relations intensified.[12] Finally, the relationship was taken to a new level on July 16, 2013, when Lukashenka and Xi Jinping signed a joint statement on establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership in Beijing.[13]

While Belarus celebrated the comprehensive strategic partnership as a huge success, China still displayed modest interest in the political partnership. Marin suggests that Lukashenka is "overestimating the link between *political* relations and an *economic* partnership."[14] China's interest at the time was mainly in expanding the transit of goods, Belarus' growing role as a buyer of Chinese products, and the realisation of a joint industrial park (today known

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[9] Turabekova, "Belarus," 4.

[10] Roza Turabekova, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations: Origins, Formats, Structure [in Russian]," Nashe Mnenie [Our Opinion], December 4, 2019, https://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/6988.html.

[11] "Lukashenka told what he considers the most important in the Belarusian-Chinese friendship [in Russian]," *BelTA*, September 30, 2016, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-rasskazal-chto-schitaet-samym-vazhnym-v-belorussko-kitajskoj-druzhbe-212564-2016/.

[12] Turabekova, "Belarus," 4.

[13] President of the People's Republic of China and President of the Republic of Belarus, "Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Belarus on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership [in Russian]," July 16, 2013, http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-07/17/content_29440117.htm.

[14] Anaïs Marin, *Minsk-Beijing: What Kind of Strategic Partnership?*, Russie.Nei.Vision 102 (Paris: IFRI, 2017), 14, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/marin_minsk_beijing_strategic_partnership_2017.pdf.

as *Great Stone*).[15] In addition, Lukashenka proposed Belarus as the point of departure for deeper integration of China and the Eurasian Economic Space (former Customs Union) in 2012, proclaiming: "If you come to Belarus, consider that you have come to Kazakhstan, consider that you have come to Russia."[16]

Lukashenka's integration attempt did not catch much attention, whereas Xi Jinping's presentation of his bold "One Belt, One Road" strategy (now Belt-Road-Initiative or BRI) in September 2013 received particular attention.[17] However, it soon became apparent that the initiative "brought together in an increasingly coherent and ambitious strategy multiple separate domestic and foreign policies that predated the launch of the BRI."[18] Indeed, China signed strategic partnership agreements with Kazakhstan and Ukraine already in 2011.[19] Moreover, a year before the BRI, China launched the 17+1 initiative, including most countries of Central Eastern Europe, but not Belarus (and Ukraine). All in all, the BRI established a framework to connect the capacious European market with China's potent factories along several land-based corridors (the Silk Road Economic Belt or SREB) and sea routes. China, nonetheless, was seemingly aware of the geopolitical competition over the gateway countries in-between the EU and Russia, above all Ukraine and Belarus.[20]

Jaszcyzk suggests that in 2013 "Belarus itself was certainly not China's first choice for BRI."[21] Instead, Ukraine was Beijing's preferred partner, due to

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[15] Turabekova, "Belarus," 4.

[16] "Years of Friendship and Cooperation [in Russian]," *Segodnya Belarus' [Belarus Today]*, January 19, 2012, https://www.sb.by/articles/gody-druzhby-i-sotrudnichestva.html.

[17] For the origins of China's BRI, Wolff, *China's Belt and Road Initiative*, 9-11.

[18] Ibid., 9.

[19] On the development of BRI in Eurasia, Peter Braga and Kaneshko Sangar, "Strategy Amidst Ambiguity: The Belt and Road and China's Foreign Policy Approach to Eurasia," *The Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues/La Revue de Dialogues Inter-Régionaux*, January 1, 2020, https://doi.org/10.25518/2593-9483.132.

[20] Anthony V. Rinna, "The Beijing–Minsk Partnership and Belarus's Role in China's Economic Relations with the European Union," *China Report* 57, no. 1 (2021): 81-82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445520984756; Braga and Sangar, "Strategy Amidst Ambiguity."

[21] Waldemar Jaszczyk, "The Belarus Crisis Threatens China's Belt and Road Initiative," *China Monitor*, Warsaw Institute, September 4, 2020, https://warsawinstitute.org/belarus-crisis-threatens-chinas-belt-road-initiative/.

its access to the Black Sea, its better industrial base and established role as a major food exporter.[22] Furthermore, Kyiv was to sign a free trade and association agreement with the EU, making it an even better fit for China's intentions.[23]

2014-2019: an exemplary relationship

Consequently, Euromaidan and Russia's military intervention in Ukraine troubled China, both politically and in terms of its economic plans.[24] Now, Minsk could convince Beijing with "its appearance of stability and predictability […] and the country presented relatively low military and political risks compared to its neighbours."[25] Thus, the war in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea brought China and Belarus closer. Unsurprisingly, in 2014 Belarusian national media started to dedicate more attention to Sino-Belarusian relations, contends Astapenia.[26] Foreign interest, by contrast, remained low.[27]

Both states further invested in the relationship. Exchanges of high-level officials frequently occurred.[28] In addition, Lukashenka visited China every year between 2015 and 2019. Xi Jinping's visit in May 2015 underscored the importance of Belarus in China's BRI strategy as, on this occasion, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed.[29] The second "capstone"

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[22] Jakub Jakóbowski and Kamil Kłysiński, *The Non-Strategic Partnership Belarus-China Relations*, OSW Studies 81 (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2021), 12, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/OSW-Studies_The-non-strategic-partnership_net.pdf; Jaszczyk, "Belarus Crisis Threatens."

[23] Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 24.

[24] Anthony Rinna, "The China Factor in Russia's Response to the Belarus Crisis," *New Eastern Europe*, August 21, 2020, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/08/21/the-china-factor-in-russias-response-to-the-belarus-crisis/.

[25] Jaszczyk, "Belarus Crisis Threatens."

[26] Ryhor Astapenia, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations: From Great Promise to Failure," *Belarus Digest*, April 11, 2014, https://belarusdigest.com/story/belarusian-chinese-relations-from-great-promise-to-failure/.

[27] See a notable exception in Artem Shrajbman, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations: Expectations, Problems and Perspectives" (Kyiv: FES - Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/11022.pdf.

[28] Siarhei Bohdan, "China as An Epic Failure of Belarusian Foreign Policy," *Belarus Digest*, September 14, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20210316150831/https://belarusdigest.com/story/china-as-an-epic-failure-of-belarusian-foreign-policy/.

[29] Rinna, "Beijing–Minsk Partnership," 81.

document is Lukashenka's Presidential Directive No. 5 "On the development of bilateral relations of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China" from September 2015. These documents highlight two central features of the Sino-Belarusian political cooperation: mutual support of sovereignty and territorial integrity.[30] Hence, Belarus supports China's position on Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Falungong.[31]

China's strong principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and its promise of mutual support allow Lukashenka to play the "China card" in order to gain – at least symbolically – in sovereignty when Belarus' independence is contested.[32] In other words, Belarus is using its multi-vector foreign policy to signal Russia that it might become (mostly economically) independent.[33] For example, when tensions between Minsk and Moscow rose following the crisis in Ukraine, Lukashenka sought closer relations with Beijing and, in addition, with the EU. The Belarusian Foreign Policy Index indicates this re-dimensioning of foreign policy (see figure 1, p. 154).[34]

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[30] President of the Republic of Belarus and President of the People's Republic of China, "Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China [in Russian]," May 10, 2015, para.1, https://www.pravo.by/upload/docs/op/I01500037_1445979600.pdf; President of the Republic of Belarus, "Directive No. 5. On the development of bilateral relations of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China [in Russian]," August 31, 2015, 1, https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=P01500005&p1=1.

[31] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Relations between China and Belarus [in Chinese]," updated February 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_678892/sbgx_678896/.

[32] Jaszczyk, "Belarus Crisis Threatens."

[33] Krzysztof Mrozek, "Belarus in the Multipolar World", *New Eastern Europe*, March 5, 2019, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/03/05/belarus-in-the-multipolar-world/.

[34] Both the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) and Minsk Dialogue (MD) allocate positive and negative points to diplomatic, economic, and political events. The index results from the addition of all points in the observation period. While BISS published both a detailed rating of the events for each country as well as a generalized guideline on how to assess events, MD only publishes the accounts for each country. See for example Dzianis Melyantsou, ed., *Belarus Foreign Policy Index*, no. 31, March-April 2016 (Vilnius: Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016), 19-23, https://belinstitute.com/sites/default/files/2020-06/BISS_FPI31_2016en.pdf; Dzianis Melyantsou, ed., *Minsk Barometer*, no. 1, January-Februar 2018 (Minsk: Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, 2018), 26-30, http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/reports/pdf/1-en.pdf.

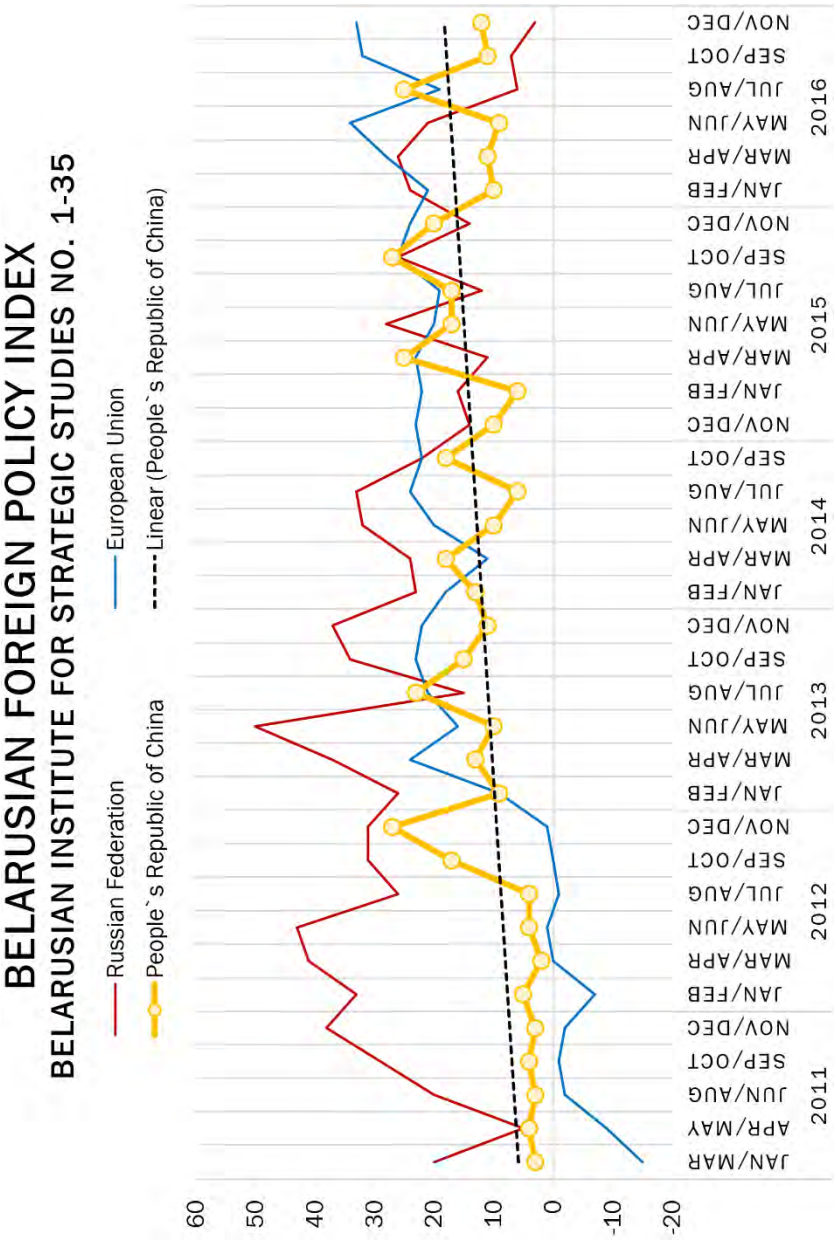

Figure 1 - Belarusian Foreign Policy Index 2011-2016 for the Russian Federation, the European Union and the People's Republic of China including a linear trend of the PRC's index (own presentation, source: Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Foreign Policy Index No. 1-35).

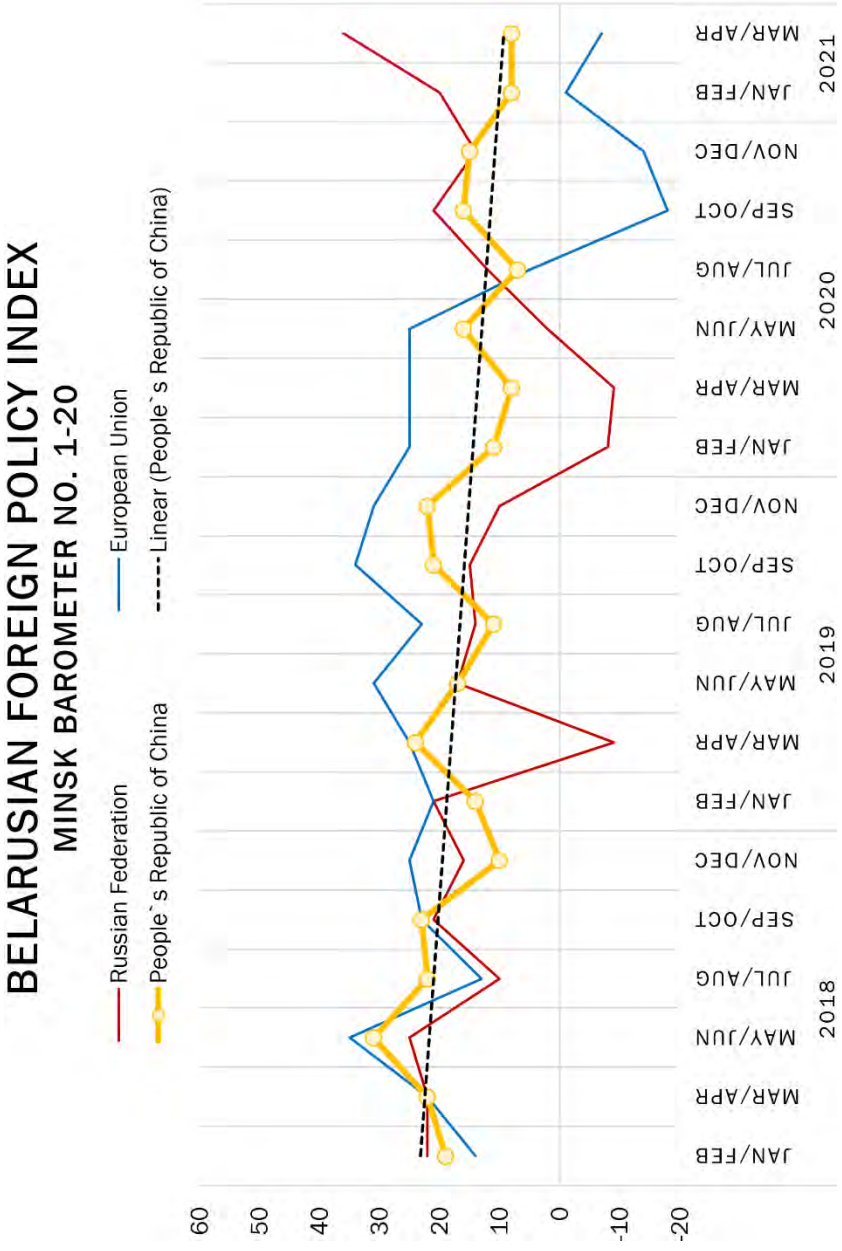

Figure 2 - Belarusian Foreign Policy Index 2011-2016 for the Russian Federation, the European Union and the People's Republic of China including a linear trend of the PRC's index (own presentation, source: Minsk Dialogue, Minsk Barometer No. 1-20).

Since 2015, most bilateral cooperation has been labelled as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.[35] In 2016, Lukashenka and Xi presented the "Joint Statement on Establishing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Featuring Mutual Trust and Win-Win Cooperation."[36] Thus, the political partnership reached the highest possible level as defined in China's partnership hierarchy.[37]

At that time, Belarus' China policy shifted towards a more economy-driven approach. Lukashenka, in 2016, underscored the importance of economy in the relationship appointing his Economic Advisor Kiryl Rudy as the new Belarusian ambassador to the PRC.[38] Furthermore, Minsk became an observer in the 17+1 initiative,[39] and China began opening its market to Belarusian food exports.[40] In 2017, Lukashenka took part in the first "Belt and Road" Summit. Belarus expressed confidence in becoming "a leading regional participant in the Belt and Road initiative along the continental bridge between Europe and Asia."[41] In 2019, Lukashenka paid an official visit to China for the second "Belt and Road" Summit. For all these reasons, the BRI has certainly become the "backbone" of the relationship.

Creating a bridge from China to Europe required Minsk to dismantle the sanctions imposed by the EU since 2006 and improve its relations with Brussels and other European capitals. The EU lifted its sanctions in 2015/16, but Belarus' distinct pro-Russian orientation prevented a more profound

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35 Turabekova, "Belarus," 5.

36 Wolff, *China's Belt and Road Initiative*, 34.

37 Braga and Sangar, "Strategy Amidst Ambiguity."

38 Turabekova, "Belarus," 5.

39 Huo Yuzhen, "The China-CEEC Summit Opens a New Chapter in China-CEEC Cooperation," Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:viJtO-tUzmIJ:www.cpifa.org/en/cms/book/322+&cd=1&hl=de&ct=clnk&gl=at.

40 Alexandra Murphy, "Belarus-China Relations," Backgrounder No. 6 (Minsk: Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, February 6, 2019), http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/backgrounders/pdf/2019-02-06__MD_Backgrounder-6_Murphy.pdf.

41 Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the People's Republic of China, "On Political Relations between Belarus and China [in Russian]," https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral/.

integration than limited access to the Eastern Partnership program and prospective visa liberalisations.

In 2015, Russia founded the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), replacing the Eurasian Economic Space and the Customs Union. Moscow quickly showed its acceptance of the BRI announcing to link the Silk Road Economic Belt and the EAEU. However, the question of the practical implementation remained unanswered. As a result, Belarus found itself amidst a threefold politico-economic integration process. The signing of the BRI-EAEU cooperation agreement in May 2018 helped deconflict the two integration projects and increased Belarus' importance as a transit country.[42] The agreement, however, does not provide lower tariffs but harmonises the legal frameworks for customs, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and other technical issues of the cooperation with China. Regarding Belarus, the agreement also establishes a legal framework for compliance with WTO key principles, as Minsk is only joining WTO.[43] Furthermore, bilateral relations between China and Belarus reached another high point with visa-free travel in 2018.[44]

Despite these positive dynamics, the Belarusian Foreign Policy Index has shown a slight downward trend in the Sino-Belarusian partnership since 2018 (see figure 2, p. 155). However, it is noteworthy that the PRC index is almost exclusively made up of positive scores. In contrast, the more dynamic relations with Russia and the EU over the same period are characterised by greater volatility of their points. Therefore, this trend only shows a plateau in the Belarusian relationship with China, not a deterioration.

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[42] Rinna, "Beijing-Minsk Partnership," 83-84, 86-88; Brian G. Carlson, "Why China Will Support Russia in Belarus," *Diplomat*, August 31, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/why-china-will-support-russia-in-belarus/; Ziguo Li, "Connecting the BRI with Eurasian Economic Union Is Strategic Choice of China, Russia," CGTN.com, April 26, 2019, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d78676a4d34457a6333566d54/index.html.

[43] "EAEU-China Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement Takes Effect," *BelTA*, October 25, 2019, https://eng.belta.by/economics/view/eaeu-china-trade-and-economic-cooperation-agreement-takes-effect-125378-2019/.

[44] "Belarus-China Visa-Free Agreement Comes into Force," *Xinhua,* August 10, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/12/c_137383908.htm.

Simultaneously, since 2018, Moscow has articulated with increasing frequency its "desire" to deepen the integration of the Russo-Belarusian Union State.[45] For this reason, China may have taken a more cautious approach vis-à-vis Belarus. Playing a geopolitical game over Belarus, as some researchers argue, is not worth the effort for Beijing.[46] Minsk, for its part, repeatedly tried to play China and Russia off to its advantage.[47] Beijing supported Lukashenka several times through loans and credit lines, thus strengthening Belarus' financial independence. Still, many Chinese credit lines come with economic conditionality, despite the titular non-conditional political relationship. In December 2019, however, China significantly strengthened Lukashenka's negotiating position versus Putin with a non-tied loan of USD 500 million.[48] Although, it is false to assume that Beijing was (and still is) motivated to "subsidise the Belarusian economy or to stand up for Minsk in a possible conflict with Moscow."[49]

2020 and beyond: a Health Silk Road with potholes

As Lukashenka scored a victory in the December 2019 negotiations with Putin over subsidies for oil, gas and the coordination of tax systems, at the beginning of 2020, Belarus urgently needed to diversify its diplomatic relations and economy further.[50] Over the horizon, however, a health crisis emerged in China.

Following the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan at the turn of the year, Belarus sent its first humanitarian aid to China in January 2020. Later that year, China sent masks, other medical supplies and advice on how to handle

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45 Yauheni Preiherman, "Unsettled Union: The Future of the Belarus-Russia Relationship," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, January 21, 2020, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_unsettled_union_the_future_of_the_belarus_russia_relationship/.

46 Maxim Samorukov and Temur Umarov, "China's Relations with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova: Less Than Meets the Eye," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, December 31, 2020, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83538.

47 Lydia Misnik, "'Replace Russia': how Belarus is friends with China [in Russian]," *Gazeta.Ru*, August 11, 2020, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/08/11_a_13189927.shtml.

48 Ibid.

49 Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 12.

50 Preiherman, "Unsettled Union."

the Corona pandemic in return.[51] However, Lukashenka largely downplayed the pandemic before the presidential elections in August 2020.[52] He only really changed his mind after the elections. As Belarus became the second country worldwide to approve Russia's vaccine *Sputnik V* in December 2020, he even called on the people to get vaccinated.[53] In February 2021, Belarus received 100,000 doses of China's *Sinopharm* free of charge, starting vaccination in mid-March.[54] Another batch of Chinese vaccines for 150,000 people was delivered in May.[55] Belarus is expecting one million additional doses by the end of August.[56]

While cooperation along the *Health Silk Road* seemingly worked well, the mass protests following the presidential elections in August 2020 strained Sino-Belarusian relations noticeably. Before the elections, China already refrained from granting Belarus new projects or loans over its quarrels with Russia.[57] Nonetheless, Xi Jinping was the first head of state to congratulate Lukashenka on his "election victory." He noted:

> China and Belarus are 'iron brothers' and all-weather partners. I attach great importance to the development of Sino-Belarusian relations and value the good working relations and personal friendship with you.[58]

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[51] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 9.

[52] Benno Zogg, "Europe's Outlier: Belarus and Covid-19," April 29, 2020, https://isnblog.ethz.ch/politics/europes-outlier-belarus-and-covid-19.

[53] "Lukashenko 'grateful' for Russian Aid as Belarus Leader Meets Putin", *Euronews*, February 22, 2021, https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/22/lukashenko-grateful-for-russian-aid-as-belarus-leader-meets-putin-in-sochi.

[54] Dzianis Melyantsou, ed., *Minsk Barometer*, no. 20, March-April 2021 (Minsk: Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, 2021), 11, http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/reports/pdf/MB_20_en.pdf

[55] "Plane with 300,000 Doses of Chinese COVID-19 Vaccine Lands in Minsk," *BelTA*, May 18, 2021, https://eng.belta.by/society/view/plane-with-300000-chinese-covid-19-vaccine-lands-in-minsk-139976-2021/.

[56] "Belarus to Get Million Doses of China's COVID-19 Vaccine in August," *BelTA*, August 16, 2021, https://eng.belta.by/society/view/belarus-to-get-million-doses-of-chinas-covid-19-vaccine-in-august-142498-2021/.

[57] Reid Standish, "Is China Cooling On Belarus's Lukashenka?", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 5, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-china-cooling-on-lukashenka-investment-leverage-eu-moscow/31136175.html.

[58] "Foreign leaders congratulate Alexander Lukashenko on winning elections [in Russian]," *BelTA*, August 10, 2020, https://www.belta.by/politics/view/zarubezhnye-lidery-pozdravljajut-aleksandra-lukashenko-s-pobedoj-na-vyborah-402300-2020/.

In August 2020, Chinese officials spoke out against international interference in Belarus' internal affairs following Western criticism of the crackdown. However, this referred to Western support for the opposition only. Russia's "support" for Lukashenka got tacit approval. In the end, China and Russia have the same interests towards Belarus: prevention of a colour revolution and non-interference by external (Western) actors.[59]

Chinese party media at first paid little attention to the 2020 post-election protests. As political unrest continued for days, the coverage followed Russia's propaganda line and some official statements of Lukashenka himself but refrained from adopting other Belarusian narratives.[60] One article even emphasised that Lukashenka may need Russia's assistance in handling the situation after the elections.[61] It is even possible that China would have backed an open Russian intervention despite all the argumentative difficulties.[62] Beijing generally prefers to preserve the status quo in its partner countries but not at all costs. China fears the deterioration of EU-Belarus relations, which could harm its economic interests, especially Belarus' transit role in the SREB.[63] Hence, Xi Jinping will ultimately be choosing stability over Lukashenka.[64]

The presidential election of 2020 marked a change in the Belarus-China relationship. The sanctions imposed by the EU deepen the financial and political dependency on Russia. Lukashenka, therefore, seeks China's support even more often, as he clings to power and wants to appear

[59] Carlson, "Why China;" Reid Standish, "Belarusian Protests Upend Lukashenka's Geopolitical Game With Russia, China, The West," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 14, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/belarusian-protests-upend-lukashenka-s-geopolitical-game-with-russia-china-the-west-/30784169.html.

[60] Umarov, "In Belarus;" Interview with a Minsk-based China expert, March 12, 2021.

[61] Zhang Yanlu, "Will Belarus Face the Same Fate as Ukraine with Intervention from the West?", *Global Times*, August 20, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1198391.shtml.

[62] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 10.

[63] Carlson, "Why China;" Standish, "Is China Cooling."

[64] Dimitri Simes and David Saveliev, "China's Support for Belarus' Lukashenko Masks Belt and Road Qualms," Nikkei Asia, October 9, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/China-s-support-for-Belarus-Lukashenko-masks-Belt-and-Road-qualms.

sovereign.[65] He constantly tries to sweet-talk China into turning on the money supply again.[66] However, it seems that China is respecting Russia's leadership role in the Belarusian crisis. The appointment of Xie Xiaoyong as the PRC's ambassador to Belarus in autumn 2020 underlines this; he has a long experience working with Russia and is well connected in Moscow.[67]

In contrast to Beijing's cautious stance of 2020, increasing Western sanctions in 2021 seem to amplify Russian and Chinese support for Belarus.[68] As Jakóbowski noted, Chinese party media took an anti-Western attitude criticising the EU's sanctions after the forced landing of a civil airliner in Minsk on 23 May 2021.[69] Moreover, Minsk supported China on non-interference in Hong Kong, and Beijing rejected the EU's draft resolution on human rights in Belarus in the UN.[70] However, China is still aware of the risks of supporting Lukashenka. Arseny Sivitski indicates that Beijing knows that "cooperation on a whole series of fronts could become frozen as a result."[71] In a recent interview, he added that "despite Beijing's rhetoric, its interest in Belarus is decreasing day by day."[72]

It remains to be seen how the political dimension of Sino-Belarusian relations will develop. In any case, the Russian factor has once again gained more importance since 2020. China trusts Russia's intentions in Belarus,

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65 "Lukashenko: There is no surrender of sovereignty with me [in Russian]," *BelTA*, May 26, 2021, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-sdacha-suvereniteta-eto-ne-so-mnoj-443163-2021/.

66 "Lukashenko: Minsk and Beijing successfully resist all hostile attacks and demonstrate the strength of friendship and resilience [in Russian]," *BelTA*, June 15, 2021, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-minsk-i-pekin-uspeshno-protivostojat-vsem-vrazhdebnym-vypadam-i-demonstrirujut-krepost-445926-2021/.

67 Interview with Minsk-based China expert.

68 Raffaello Pantucci, "Why Russia and China Are Competing to Woo Belarus," *Spectator Australia*, June 2, 2021, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-russia-and-china-seek-to-woo-pariah-states-like-belarus.

69 Jakub Jakóbowski, "The Belarus-China 'Iron Brotherhood' Begins to Rust," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, May 27, 2021, https://cepa.org/the-belarus-china-iron-brotherhood-begins-to-rust/.

70 Melyantsou, *Minsk Barometer no. 20*, 10.

71 Simes and Saveliev, "China's Support."

72 Arseny Sivitsky, "Scenario of Lukashenka's Resignation Satisfies Washington DC, Moscow and Brussels," *Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies*, July 2, 2021, https://forstrategy.org/en/posts/20210702.

while Moscow respects Beijing's (economic) interests too. The open question is whether the Belarusian China policy is now driven by Minsk, Moscow, or Beijing. To a lesser extent, the fate of Lukashenka will have an impact too, given his personal investment in the relations.

Economics: an odd couple and a Great Stone

Trade and economic interests

Belarus's geographic distance from China, limited resources, and small market narrow the prospects for Sino-Belarusian economic cooperation.[73] In fact, Minsk is not an important trading partner for the PRC. Belarus' main export products are fertilisers (61%) and milk and meat (12%).[74] In addition, about 10% of Belarusian exports are plastics. The remaining approx. 17% account for other categories like wood and machinery.[75] In contrast, China's exports to Belarus include more advanced products. However, until today Belarus has not managed to enter the Chinese market with its machinery and heavy-duty vehicles.

Moreover, Marin notes that China is a tough business partner.[76] The trade balance is negative, with Belarus importing roughly five times worth of goods than exporting. In 2020, Belarus exported goods worth USD 748.2 million, imports from China amounted to USD 3.7 billion.[77] Thus, China was heads-up with Ukraine as Belarus' second-largest trading partner after Russia (or third, like figure 3 indicates, if the EU is taken as a whole).

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[73] Umarov, "In Belarus."

[74] Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations."

[75] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 18.

[76] Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 8.

[77] National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, "Commodity Exports from the Republic of Belarus by Non-CIS Countries," 2021, https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-excel/Oficial_statistika/Godovwe/Export_vne_SNG20g-1-en.xlsx; National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, "Commodity Imports to the Republic of Belarus by Non-CIS Countries," 2021, https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-excel/Oficial_statistika/Godovwe/Import_vne_SNG20g-1-en.xlsx.

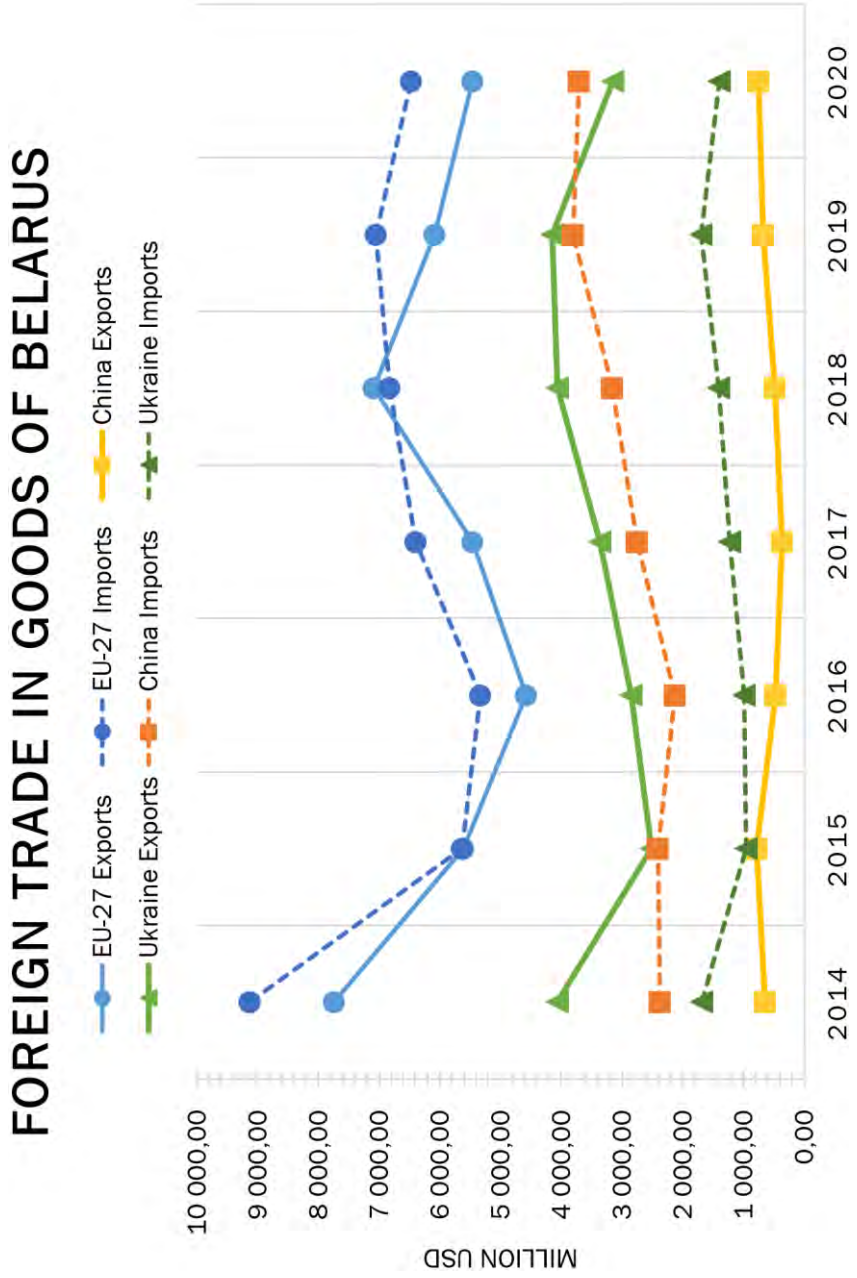

Figure 3 - Foreign Trade (goods) of Belarus 2014-2020 with the EU-27 members (as of 2021), China and Ukraine (own presentation, source: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus).

Belarus has established itself as an intermediary in the EU-China trade, Belarusian economics argue.[78] Several experts identify the geographical location as a great asset. Establishing a presence in Belarus is arguably one of Beijing's core interests, as the country is a steppingstone to the markets of the EU and EAEU.[79] Yet, using the EAEU Customs Code, Russia is effectively curtailing the free entry of Chinese goods assembled in Belarus to the EAEU.[80] One victim of this practice is the car manufacturer BelGee, a joint venture of Belarus' BelAZ and China's Geely launched in November 2017. The company never became profitable and suspended production in mid-2020.[81]

As Chinese products cannot easily access the EAEU market, China was not eager to open its market for foreign goods from Belarus too. However, Belarus wants to sell food, trucks, and agricultural machinery to China, which is a potent alternative to the Russian market.[82] Especially the high demand for food imports in China, accompanied by political promotion from Xi and Lukashenka, leads to continuous growth in this sector.[83] Thus, Belarus' food exports amounted to USD 250 million or a third of the overall exports in 2020.[84]

Furthermore, Belarus seeks short-term profits from foreign direct investments, economic modernisation and wants to attract Chinese residents and investors in the joint Chinese-Belarusian industrial park. Developing

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[78] P.V. Hushcha and A.V. Gribov, "The Current State and Prospects of Economic Cooperation between Belarus and China," *Ehkonomika i Banki (Economics and Banks)*, no. 2 (2018): 75-76.

[79] Rinna, "Beijing–Minsk Partnership," e.g. 80, 85; see also Wolff, *China's Belt and Road Initiative*, 34.

[80] Arseny Sivitsky, "Belarus-China strategic partners and iron brothers," *Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies*, October 21, 2020, https://forstrategy.org/en/posts/20201021.

[81] Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations."

[82] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 8.

[83] "Lukashenko: Belarusian companies have broken into the Chinese market and are now expanding there [in Russian]," *BelTA*, March 19, 2021, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belorusskie-predprijatija-prorvalis-na-kitajskij-rynok-i-teper-razvorachivajutsja-tam-433436-2021/; Kiryl Rudy, "Belarus and China: Growth and Development," interview, *Export of Belarus (Advertising and Information Magazine)* 15, no. 4 (2018): 17.

[84] "Lukashenko: Belarusian companies;" National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, "Commodity Exports from the Republic of Belarus by Non-CIS Countries."

high-tech sectors such as space and navigation, biotechnologies, and quantum computing are Belarus long-term goals.[85] That way, the Belarusian leadership wants to reduce its dependence on Russia's economic influence.

Investments, loans, and modernisation

Also, in terms of financial support, Russia remains the largest donor of Belarus with 45.5% or about USD 7.6 billion.[86] Belarusian debts to China amount to only 20% of total foreign public debt.[87] Nevertheless, Chinese money helped to keep Belarus' economy afloat. Credits to Belarus totalled USD 16 billion by 2014.[88] In addition, several hundred million USD flow into Belarus annually as non-conditional and non-refundable development aid (e.g., housing construction or the *Great Stone Industrial Park*). However, the bulk of Belarusian debt to China arises from tied loans.[89] Moreover, Belarus is not the principal benefactor of China's money in the wider region, as Wolff observes:

> While Belarus is generally hailed as one of the great success stories of the BRI […], in terms of actual investment China's engagement with Ukraine has by far exceeded its engagement with Belarus and Moldova, both in the period before and since the inception of the BRI.[90]

However, in 2019, China granted a USD 15 billion line of credit to the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus.[91] Belarus also actively seeks Chinese support to modernise, its "petrified and ineffective Belarusian economic system."[92] From 2007 to 2019, China provided a meagre USD 4.6 billion in export loans for infrastructure and production projects in Belarus.[93] Although a word of warning is in order about drawing conclusions based on

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[85] Hushcha and Gribov, "Current State and Prospects," 77-78.
[86] Sergei Kuznetsov, "Belarus Seeks Spot on China's Expansion Map," *Obserwator Finansowy [Financial Observer]*, January 20, 2019, https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/in-english/business/belarus-seeks-spot-on-chinas-expansion-map/.
[87] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 23.
[88] Astapenia, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations."
[89] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 9.
[90] Wolff, *China's Belt and Road Initiative*, 34.
[91] Standish, "Belarusian Protests."
[92] Jakóbowski, "'Iron Brotherhood'."
[93] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 21.

these billion USD credits as they rarely materialize, because most of the time, Belarusian banks and companies only partially retrieve the committed money. Samorukov and Umarov argue that rather than Chinese disinterest, the reason is Belarus' conviction of its "own indispensability."[94] Katsiaryna Zaitsava rightly adds that the investment climate still needs extensive improvements to attract more Chinese money.[95] For instance, Austria's 7.4% share of inward Belarusian FDI easily exceeds China's 3%.[96] Moreover, Belarus and China have different senses of privatisation, argue Jakóbowski and Kłysiński. China wants to increase profits and reduce staff levels, while Belarus wants investors to keep up high social benefits and headcounts. To spur up Chinese investments, Minsk unsuccessfully offered large (even majority) shares of 22 state-owned enterprises in 2017.[97]

Additionally, modernisation via tied (or export) loans often did not work out.[98] The tied loans "usually bind Belarusian companies to purchase 50-75 percent of project equipment from China."[99] Critics note the poor quality of Chinese equipment and often a flagrant lack of know-how.[100] In 2020 Belarusian media extensively covered the failed modernisations of the Svietlahorsk pulp and paper plant (loss of USD 850 million) and the Dobrush paper plant (loss of USD 350 million). Completing the Dobrush factory's modernisation takes another USD 83 million and assistance from an Austrian company. The failed modernisation of three cement plants

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[94] Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations."

[95] Katsiaryna Zaitsava, "Cooperation of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China in the Investment Field [in Russian]," *Bankaŭski Vesnik [Banking Bulletin of the National Bank of the Republik of Belarus]*, no. 8 (673) (2019): 43.

[96] National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, "Structure of Foreign Investment in Real Sector of the Economy of the Republic of Belarus by Main Investing Countries in 2020," https://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/real-sector-of-the-economy/foreign-investment/graphical-data-graphs-diagrams/structure-of-foreign-investment-in-real-sector-of-the-economy-of-the-republic-of-belarus-by-main-inv/; Jakóbowski, "'Iron Brotherhood'."

[97] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 20.

[98] Ibid., 22.

[99] Andrei Yeliseyeu, "China Fails to Deliver on Its Promises in Belarus," *Chinaobservers*, July 31, 2020, https://chinaobservers.eu/china-fails-to-deliver-on-its-promises-in-belarus/.

[100] Siarhei Bohdan, "Myths of Chinese Engagement in Belarus: No Money Between Friends?", *Belarus Digest*, July 9, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20210302140214/https://belarusdigest.com/story/myths-of-chinese-engagement-in-belarus-no-money-between-friends/.

accounted for over one billion USD outstanding debts in 2019.[101] Even Lukashenka himself announced in early 2020 that he needed to talk with Xi Jinping about the disappointing outcomes of several investment projects.[102]

Great Stone Industrial Park

In stark contrast, the China-Belarus Industrial Park (CBIP or "the Park"), also known as *Great Stone Industrial Park*, turns out to be no disappointment but has its own problems. The Park itself is a 112 km² special economic zone in line with China's Oversea Economic and Trade Cooperation Zones policy. It is the largest of its type created outside of the PRC.[103] It is built in the Smolevichy district, about 25 km southwest of the Belarusian capital. The location is particularly advantageous. Minsk International Airport, transnational roads and railways connect the park with the markets in the EU and the EAEU. In addition, the port of Klaipeda is only 500 km northeast.[104] China holds 68% of the Park, while 31.33% belong to Belarus. The German Duisburger Hafen AG has held a minor share of 0.67% since 2018.[105] The CBIP's system of governance is a copy of the three-level system of the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park.[106]

Lukashenka proposed his idea of constructing a joint industrial park for the first time in 2010. Work started after he decreed to establish a special economic zone in 2012.[107] Although, the construction was delayed and in 2014 Lukashenka called the pace a "disgrace to the government."[108] Finally, when Xi Jinping visited Belarus in 2015, the CBIP was included in the Belt

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101 Yeliseyeu, "China Fails to Deliver."
102 Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 22.
103 Ibid., 15.
104 Zhigao Liu, Michael Dunford and Weidong Liu, "Coupling National Geo-Political Economic Strategies and the Belt and Road Initiative: The China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park," *Political Geography* 84 (January 2021), 7, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102296.
105 Zhangxi Cheng, "Building the Belt and Road Initiative? – Practices En Route," *The Pacific Review* 33, no. 5 (September 2, 2020), 795, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1589560.
106 Liu, Dunford and Liu, "Coupling National Geo-Political Economic Strategies," 10.
107 Ibid., 9.
108 Astapenia, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations."

Road Initiative.[109] As a result, the CBIP is often praised as a strategic project and the "pearl of China's New Silk Road."[110] The priority industries of the Park include machine building, electronics, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, new materials, intermodal transport, e-commerce, big data, and research and development. Moreover, Belarus wants the CBIP to become a centre for green industries.[111]

The overall building costs amount to USD 30-60 billion.[112] The project should be completed by 2060. The first phase – including the Park's headquarters – was finished in 2018.[113] However, *Great Stone* is lagging behind the original assumptions, several researchers argue.[114] According to Belarusian and Chinese official sources, the Park had a goal of 100 residents by the end of 2020.[115] However, in June 2021, only 69 residents were registered in the Park.[116] Also, in terms of investments, CBIP does not meet

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[109] Bogdan Góralczyk, "What Is China Doing in Belarus?", *Obserwator Finansowy [Financial Observer]*, August 10, 2020, https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/in-english/business/what-is-china-doing-in-belarus/.

[110] An Baijie, "Xi Says Belarus Is a Good Partner," *China Daily*, September 30, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/30/content_26944007.htm; see also Cheng, "Building the Belt and Road Initiative", 796.

[111] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 16.

[112] "China's Friendship with Belarus Threatens Russian Interests," Office for a Democratic Belarus, July 31, 2013, https://odb-office.eu/policy-briefs/chinas-friendship-belarus-threatens-russian-interests.

[113] Great Stone Industrial Park Administration, "General plan [in Russian]," *industrialpark.by*, https://industrialpark.by/o-parke/generalnyj-plan/; Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 16.

[114] Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 15; Yeliseyeu, "China Fails to Deliver;" Adrian Brona, "The Curious Timing of the Chinese Loan to Belarus," *Chinaobservers*, January 14, 2020, https://chinaobservers.eu/the-curious-timing-of-chinese-loan-to-belarus/.

[115] 'Shapiro: 100 Companies to Be Attracted to China-Belarus Industrial Park in Three Years [in Russian]," *Tut.by*, April 8, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20201127183607/https://news.tut.by/economics/491858.html; "China-Belarus Industrial Park," *China.org.cn*, April 17, 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/english/china_key_words/2019-04/17/content_74691639.html.

[116] "Lukashenko on the development of the Great Stone: We will proceed from the interests of the state and investors [in Russian]," *BelTA*, June 7, 2021, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-razvitii-velikogo-kamnja-ishodit-budem-iz-interesov-gosudarstva-i-investorov-444802-2021/.

the expectations.[117] Despite all of this, the CBIP should grow to 170 residents and ensure new investments worth one billion USD in the coming years.[118]

In general, the CBIP suffers from several systemic weaknesses. First of all, differing development ideas of the two countries delay the project regularly.[119] Secondly, Belarus' economy is not adapted to the modern and high tech needs of the intended industries in the Park.[120] Thirdly, the overall threshold for entering the Park is too high.[121] Furthermore, the Belarusian tax exemptions are faulty, as the 10-year tax-free period starts with the signature of a resident contract no matter the actual status of the infrastructure in the Park.[122] Many investors also mistrust legal certainty in Belarus and fear a deteriorating fiscal framework.[123] In addition, the Belarusian authorities reportedly insist on high environmental standards.[124] Finally, an unfriendly geo-economic environment further reduces the CBIP's attractiveness. Some products intended for US and EU markets suffer from sanctions. In addition, poor connectivity may become an issue, as Belarusian-EU relations are on an all-time low following the crackdown on the opposition since August 2020. Due to different technical standards and indirect protective measures (by Russia), the EAEU markets are not as easily accessible as intended.[125] Nonetheless, the recent increase in residents shows that some of these problems might have been solved. Overall, the CBIP is probably still the most successful Belarusian-Chinese economic project with high potential and high risk for the future.

Economic results from the 2020 mass protests

Following the mass protests in Belarus since 2020, China repeatedly demonstrated its reluctance to keep Lukashenka's regime politically and financially alive. As a result, funds for joint projects were frozen in, as

117 "Lukashenko on the development"; Brona, "Curious Timing."
118 Ibid.
119 Cheng, "Building the Belt and Road Initiative," 796.
120 Ibid.; Jakóbowski and Klysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 16.
121 Cheng, "Building the Belt and Road Initiative", 796-97.
122 Ibid., 797.
123 Kuznetsov, "Belarus Seeks Spot."
124 Liu, Dunford and Liu, "Coupling National Geo-Political Economic Strategies," 7.
125 Cheng, "Building the Belt and Road Initiative," 797.

Lukashenka's massive crackdown on the opposition severely damaged the relationship with the EU.[126] A further obstacle for Belarusian external trade are the EU's sanctions following the forced diversion of a Ryanair flight to Minsk on 23 May 2021. Hence, the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda, the main port for Belarus' global trade, is now partially closed for Belarus' potash fertiliser export. However, experts do not see an immediate threat to the Belarusian economy. They, moreover, indicate that even without EU sanctions, Lukashenka wants more exports to be redirected via Russia's Baltic Sea ports as already practised with refined oil products.[127] Although, if China redirects its transits, this would severely damage Belarus' economy.

Despite the bump in the relations following the elections, 2020 turned out a very positive year for Sino-Belarusian bilateral trade, which reached a new high at USD 4.6 billion. The trade balance even improved for Belarus.[128] Lukashenka is trying to attract more Chinese investment and expand Belarus' access to Chinese military technology to deter potential external threats.[129] Although, Chinese experts argue that following the global economic slowdown is "making it even more unlikely that China would provide new major economic assistance to Belarus."[130] It remains to be seen for all these reasons if future economic cooperation will be as prosperous as before 2020.

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126 Standish, "Is China Cooling."

127 "Most Belarus Potash Exports Not Affected by EU Sanctions – Analysts", *MINING.COM*, June 28, 2021, https://www.mining.com/web/most-belarus-potash-exports-not-affected-by-eu-sanctions-analysts/; Sofija Lapeniene, "How Painful Will Belarus Sanctions Be for Lithuanian Economy?", *LRT.lt*, July 5, 2021, https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1443929/how-painful-will-belarus-sanctions-be-for-lithuanian-economy; Valery Karbalevich, "New post-sanctioned reality [in Russian]," *Svobodnye Novosti Plus [Free News Plus]*, June 29, 2021, https://www.sn-plus.com/2021/06/29/novaya-postsankczionnaya-realnost/.

128 Dzianis Melyantsou, ed., *Minsk Barometer*, no. 19, January-February 2021 (Minsk: Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, 2021), 12, http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/reports/pdf/MB_19_en.pdf

129 Simes and Saveliev, "China's Support."

130 Ibid.

Military: exercises, donations and the joint *Polonez*

Sino-Belarusian defence cooperation

China started its defence cooperation with Ukraine and Belarus already in the 1990s.[131] Minsk delivered many surplus weapons systems from the dissolved Soviet Armed Forces to China, as Beijing was under an arms embargo since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.[132] Since the two countries signed another agreement in 2010, the cooperation significantly increased.[133] Overall, by 2018, five treaties on military-technical cooperation had been signed.[134]

Military aid from China encompasses utility and all-terrain vehicles, automobiles, spare parts, medical equipment and language learning materials. Moreover, in 2015 China delivered two exclusive FAW HongQi L5 cabriolets for parade duty, e.g. at the Victory Day parade.[135] In 2017, Belarus received free military equipment from China worth USD 4.5 million.[136] Furthermore, Belarus uses donated Chinese *Kaĭman* and *Volat V1* armoured reconnaissance and patrol vehicles.[137] Aleksandr Gronsky points out that these Chinese donations are often technically inferior to own Belarusian

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131 Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova."

132 Aleksandr Gronsky, "Military-Technical Cooperation between Belarus and China in Rocketry [in Russian]," *Rossiya i Novye Gosudarstva Evrazii [Russia and New States of Eurasia]*, no. 3 (2018), 135, https://doi.org/10.20542/2073-4786-2018-3-135-146.

133 Anna Maria Dyner, "The Importance of Cooperation with China for Belarus," *PSIM Bulletin No. 106* (1177) (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, August 8, 2018), https://pism.pl/publications/The_Importance_of_Cooperation_with_China_for_Belarus.

134 "Lukashenko: China played a decisive role in strengthening the defense capability of Belarus [in Russian]," *BelTA*, April 6, 2018, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-kitaj-sygral-reshajuschuju-rol-v-usilenii-oboronosposobnosti-belarusi-297481-2018/.

135 Aleksandr Gronsky, "Cooperation between Belarus and China in Military Sphere [in Russian]," *Rossiya i Novye Gosudarstva Evrazii [Russia and New States of Eurasia]*, no. 4 (2018), 159-60; "China Hands over Two Exclusive Cars for Victory Day Parade in Belarus," *Belarus.by*, April 8, 2015, https://www.belarus.by/en/press-center/70th-anniversary-of-the-great-victory/china-hands-over-two-exclusive-cars-for-victory-day-parade-in-belarus_i_0000021496.html.

136 Dyner, "The Importance of Cooperation."

137 Gronsky, "Cooperation in Military Sphere [in Russian]," 164-65.

products or licenced productions of battle-tested Russian equipment like the *Lis-PM* (a copy of the Russian *Tigr*). However, the logic behind accepting them is not military necessity, but saving money and "a desire not to offend China."[138] However, as Russia remains Belarus' essential military-technical partner, any agreements with China would not contradict Russia's interests.[139]

According to Dyner, the importance of military cooperation was highlighted when Chinese Minister of Defence Wei Fenghe visited Belarus on his second official foreign visit – right after Russia.[140] Moreover, high-ranking visits from both Ministries of Defence (MoD) are frequent. For example, from 2013 to 2017, Belarusian MoD leadership visited China seven times, and Chinese MoD leadership visited Belarus 13 times.[141]

China's primary goal is to advance its military industries.[142] As Gronsky points out, China's particular interest at the beginning of Sino-Belarusian cooperation in the 1990s was in optics, LASER technologies, electronics, software and optical ground sensing.[143] Vasily Kashin highlights that technology transfers to China "sometimes irritated Moscow," for instance when Minsk gave away know-how for heavy multi-axle chassis with high cross-country abilities (as used for the *Polonez* system).[144] Samorukov and Umarov claimed that China meanwhile developed alternatives to most of the technologies Belarus could offer.[145] Still, the military-industrial cooperation

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138 Ibid., 165.

139 Anna Maria Dyner, "The Armed Forces of Belarus," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2017), 57.

140 Dyner, "The Importance of Cooperation."

141 "Lukashenko: China played a decisive role."

142 Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 17.

143 Gronsky, "Military-Technical Cooperation," 135.

144 Vasily Kashin, "How the Myth about the Special Relationship between China and Belorussia Appeared [in Russian]," *Member Comments, Russian Council for International Affairs* (blog), September 2, 2020, https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/kak-poyavilsya-mif-ob-osobykh-otnosheniyakh-kitaya-i-belorussii/.

145 Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations."

is the most attractive economic sector to China, Marin argues based on opinions from Belarusian experts.[146]

The Polonez*: successful military-industrial cooperation*

The landmark project of the Chinese-Belarusian military-industrial collaboration is the multiple rocket launcher system *Polonez*. Development started in 2008, and the prototype was presented in 2015. In 2018, Azerbaijan bought several units of the *Polonez* MLRS.[147] Despite criticism from Russian and Belarusian experts, the *Polonez* is "the result of advanced industrial cooperation," concludes Marin.[148] It successfully reduced Belarus' dependence on Russian military technology – i.e., the old *Uragan* and *Smerch* MLRS.[149] Gronsky even argues that it "was a Belarusian response to Russia's reluctance to supply Belarus for free or at domestic prices with such cutting-edge military equipment [like the Iskander intermediate-range ballistic missile system]."[150]

In 2021, Belarusian *Gosvoenprom* announced that Belarus developed its own missiles for the *Polonez*, reducing the share of Chinese parts in the system further. The new rocket should have a range of 300 km.[151] However, other plans never materialised, such as an idea from the early 2010s to jointly develop a Sino-Belarusian SAM system.[152] Nevertheless, a notable outcome of the Sino-Belarusian defence cooperation is the fact "that Chinese weapons have entered the markets of post-Soviet republics and are being sold in a country at the junction of Russia and Europe, a crucial factor for China's future growth."[153]

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146 Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 15.
147 Gronsky, "Military-Technical Cooperation," 136; Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 16.
148 Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 17.
149 Dyner, "The Armed Forces of Belarus," 50.
150 Gronsky, "Military-Technical Cooperation," 136.
151 "Belarus Makes Own Missile for Polonez Rocket System," *Belsat.eu*, March 2, 2021, https://belsat.eu/en/news/02-03-2021-belarus-makes-own-missile-for-polonez-rocket-system/; Misnik, "Replace Russia."
152 Siarhei Bohdan, "Not All Roads Lead to Moscow: Belarusian Arms Industries between Russia and China," *Belarus Digest*, August 14, 2017, https://belarusdigest.com/story/not-all-roads-lead-to-moscow-belarusian-arms-industries-between-russia-and-china/.
153 Misnik, "Replace Russia."

In 2016, Belarus launched its first Chinese-built telecommunications satellite from the Satellite Launch Center Xichang.[154] Belarus' armed forces might benefit from the cooperation in space engineering, as China uses satellite technologies developed together with Belarus in its military geospatial intelligence satellites. Hence, they could provide imagery for the *Polonez* rockets' navigational systems, as Belarus still lacks its own satellites for this purpose.[155]

Joint exercises and military-educational exchange

When China supported Belarus' Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) observer status in 2009, the Asian politico-military organisation became Eurasian.[156] The SCO, however, is primarily a catalyst for know-how transfer from and to Belarus. Moreover, since the 2000s a bilateral partnership in training military officers has existed, which should be further developed and enhanced to general combat preparation of soldiers.[157] Until 2018, 277 Chinese officers received diplomas from the Military Academy of Belarus, while 77 Belarusian soldiers underwent courses in China.[158] Moreover, Belarusian military know-how is highly appreciated in China, as in 2018, a Chinese article praised the "advanced military management concepts and tactical ideas."[159]

Minsk and Beijing have also held joint exercises since 2011. For example, Belarusian special operations units, special forces of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Chinese airborne units and delegations of the People's Armed Police trained in Belarus and the PRC between 2011 and 2017.[160] In 2018, Belarusian special forces joined Chinese troops in the

[154] Gronsky, "Military-Technical Cooperation," 143.
[155] Ibid., 144-45.
[156] Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 15.
[157] Dyner, "The Importance of Cooperation."
[158] "Lukashenko: China played a decisive role."
[159] Jacob Zenn, "China Praises Cooperation with Belarus and Its Special Forces," *OE Watch* 8, no. 8 (August 2018), 11.
[160] Sivitsky, "Belarus-China strategic partners;" "Lukashenko: China played a decisive role."

"Eagle Assault" training exercise to improve counter-terrorism tactics.[161] So far, China and Serbia are the only countries outside the CIS that have participated in joint military exercises with the Belarusian Armed Forces.[162]

China also participated in the annual Independence Day parade on July 3 twice already, in 2018 and 2019.[163] In 2020, both the Russian and Chinese Armed Forces refused to take part in the Victory Day parade on May 9 due to the Corona pandemic.[164]

Besides high-profile activities like joint exercises and military personnel exchanges, the future for Sino-Belarusian defence cooperation is grim, according to Samorukov and Umarov.[165] It is still unclear if the PRC will be taking place in the Russian-Belarusian strategic exercise *Zapad 2021* (West 2021). Moscow invited the Chinese People's Liberation Army, which took part in the last Russian strategic exercises *Vostok 2018* (East 2021), *Centr 2019* (Centre 2019) and *Kavkaz 2020* (Caucasus 2020).[166]

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161 "Chinese, Belarusian Special Operations Forces Commence Joint Training," *China Military*, August 7, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-08/07/content_9244657.htm.

162 Marin, *Minsk-Beijing*, 15.

163 "Unprecedented Level of Development of Belarusian-Chinese Relations Noted," *BelTA*, September 24, 2020, https://eng.belta.by/politics/view/unprecedented-level-of-development-of-belarusian-chinese-relations-noted-133735-2020/; "Chinese Troops Join Belarus Military Parade as Ties Grow," *China Military*, July 4, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-07/04/content_8079655.htm.

164 "Russian, Chinese Troops Not to Take Part in Victory Day Parade in Minsk," *Belsat.eu*, April 30, 2020, https://belsat.eu/en/news/russian-chinese-troops-not-to-take-part-in-victory-day-parade-in-minsk/.

165 Samorukov and Umarov, "China's Relations."

166 Andrius Balčiūnas, "'Million Troops on Your Borders': Can Belarus-China Ties Pose Threat to Baltics?", *lrt.lt*, April 27, 2021, https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1395681/million-troops-on-your-borders-can-belarus-china-ties-pose-threat-to-baltics; Michael Kofman, "Assessing Vostok-2018," *Russia Military Analysis* (blog), September 28, 2018, https://russianmilitaryanalysis.wordpress.com/2018/09/28/assessing-vostok-2018/; Franz-Stefan Gady, "China Sends Strategic Bombers, Tanks and 1,600 Troops to Russia for Large Military Drill", *Diplomat*, September 17, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/china-sends-strategic-bombers-tanks-and-1600-troops-to-russia-for-large-military-drill/; Michael Kofman, "Overview: Kavkaz-2020," *Russia Military Analysis* (blog), September 22, 2020, https://russianmilitaryanalysis.wordpress.com/2020/09/22/overview-kavkaz-2020/.

Social/Cultural: educational exchange, language training and a cautious public

Cooperation in the social and cultural sphere between China and Belarus is quite active. Already in the early 2000s, Days of Belarusian and Chinese Culture were hosted in each country. In addition, the ministries of education signed cooperation protocols.[167] Cultural relations became even more intense since 2007. As a result of the 2013 Joint Declaration, the relationship was institutionalized in a separate commission of the Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation.[168] Furthermore, the 2015 Directive intensively covers social and cultural cooperation. There, Lukashenka announced to promote cooperation of motion picture studios, create specialised tourism agencies and open centres for Traditional Chinese Medicine and Gymnastics in each Belarusian regional capital.[169] The Directive also foresees establishing student exchange programs and funds, which apparently was realised in 2016 with new memoranda of understandings between the ministries of education.[170] Furthermore, Lukashenka announced during his 2016 visit to Beijing that Belarus eased the visa formalities and invited Chinese students and teachers to come to Belarus.[171]

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[167] U.S. Embassy to Belarus, "Minsk's Deepening Relations with China," Cable 05MINSK956_a (Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy, August 16, 2005), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05MINSK956_a.html

[168] Yingjie Sun, "Interaction between China and Belarus in the Field of Culture (1992-2018) [in Russian]," *Zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezdunarodnych otnosheny [Journal of International Law and International Relations]*, no. 3–4 (2018), 36.

[169] President of the Republic of Belarus, "On the development of bilateral relations."

[170] "Belarus and China sign a package of agreements and memoranda on cooperation in various fields," *BelTA*, September 29, 2016, https://www.belta.by/president/view/belarus-i-kitaj-zakljuchili-paket-soglashenij-i-memorandumov-o-sotrudnichestve-v-raznyh-sferah-212427-2016/; President of the Republic of Belarus, "On the development of bilateral relations."

[171] "Lukashenka and Xi Jinping Count on Development of Youth and Student Belarusian-Chinese Cooperation [in Russian]," *BelTA*, September 30, 2016, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-i-si-tszinpin-rasschityvajut-na-razvitie-molodezhnogo-i-studencheskogo-belorussko-212616-2016/.

Student and youth exchanges

The number of Chinese students at Belarusian universities and schools is constantly rising. For years, China has been the third-largest country of origin of international students at Belarusian universities (= 1,113 individuals or 7.2% in the academic year 2018/19) after Russia (9%) and Turkmenistan (50%).[172] In 2020, according to China's ambassador Cui Qiming, approximately 5,000 Chinese students were enrolled in Belarus.[173] Compared to about 1,000 students in 2005 and 2,000 in 2016, this constitutes a significant rise. In contrast, some 1,000 Belarusians studying in China in 2020 is only a slight increase from about 600 in 2016.[174]

Developing networks between both countries' youths seems to be a pillar of Sino-Belarusian societal relations. For example, the "Belarusian Republican Youth Union" signed a cooperation agreement with the "All-China Youth Federation" in 2011.[175] Yet, polls among young Belarusians in Minsk and the regional capitals suggest no desire for closer relations with Beijing (only 3.6%).[176]

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[172] Olga Dryndova, ed., "Statistik: Studierende aus China in Belarus [in German]," *Belarus-Analysen*, no. 45 (31 October 2019), 11, https://doi.org/10.31205/BA.045.01.

[173] "Cui Qiming: we highly appreciate the support and assistance that Chinese students receive in Belarus [in Russian]," *BelTA*, February 11, 2020, https://www.belta.by/society/view/tsuj-tsimin-my-vysoko-tsenim-podderzhku-i-pomosch-kotoruju-poluchajut-kitajskie-studenty-v-belarusi-379251-2020/.

[174] U.S. Embassy to Belarus, "Minsk's Deepening Relations with China;" "Results of Education Year of Belarus in China Supped up in Minsk [in Russian]," *Belradiotelekompaniya [Belteleradiocompany]*, February 11, 2020, https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/v_minske_podveli_itogi_goda_obrazovaniya_belarusi_v_kitae/.

[175] "Leading youth organizations of Belarus and China intend to strengthen contacts [in Russian]," *BelTA*, September 17, 2015, https://www.belta.by/society/view/veduschie-molodezhnye-organizatsii-belarusi-i-kitaja-namereny-ukrepit-kontakty-163130-2015/.

[176] Félix Krawatzek, *Youth in Belarus: Outlook on Life and Political Attitudes*, ZOiS Report 5 (Berlin: Centre for East European and International Studies [ZOiS], 2019), 22, https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_5_2019.pdf.

Belarusian culture and language in China and vice-versa

During the 2019 Education Year of Belarus in the PRC, three new Belarusian culture and language studies centres at Chinese Universities were opened.[177] As of March 2021, there are 14 such centres in China. In February 2021, the first Belarusian-Chinese dictionary was presented at the Belarusian State University. Chinese has been taught at the Minsk State Linguistic University since 1993 and Belarusian schools since 2006. Overall, there are 130 schools and ten universities offering Chinese classes.[178] Among them, there are five Confucius Institutes and one Confucius Class.

The first so-called "Republican Institute of Sinology named after Confucius" opened at the Belarusian State University in Minsk in 2006. In addition, it has offices and centres at several secondary schools throughout the country and at the Belarusian State Economic University and the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno.[179] In 2019, the institute became the first Confucius institute in the former Soviet countries to be awarded the title of "exemplary."[180]

In Minsk, there are two more Confucius institutes at Minsk State Linguistic University (since 2011)[181] and at Belarusian National Technical University with a unique focus on technical Chinese (since 2014).[182] Other Confucius

[177] "Results of Education Year."

[178] "The First Chinese-Belarusian Dictionary in Belarus and China Was Published at BSU [in Russian]," *Interfax-Zapad*, February 3, 2021, https://interfax.by; "Results of Education Year."

[179] "About Us [in Russian]," Republican Institute of Sinology named after Confucius of the Belarusian State University, 2021, https://rci.bsu.by/about-ru.html.

[180] "The Confucius Republican Institute of Sinology of BSU Was Awarded the Title of Exemplary [in Russian]," *BelTA*, September 9, 2019, https://www.belta.by/society/view/respublikanskomu-institutu-kitaevedenija-imkonfutsija-bgu-prisvoeno-zvanie-obraztsovogo-361299-2019/.

[181] Confucius Institute at MSLU, "About the Institute [in Russian]," *Minsk State Linguistic University*, http://ci.mslu.by/ob-institute.

[182] "Confucius Institute for Science and Technology Is the Pride of BNTU [in Russian]," *Belarusian National Technical University*, May 25, 2020, https://times.bntu.by/news/7110-institut-konfuciya-gordost-bntu.

institutes exist in Gomel (since 2017)[183] and Brest (since 2020).[184] The sixth Confucius Institute will be established at Baranovichi State University in 2024, as a Confucius Class opened in February 2021.[185] Overall, there are widespread opportunities to study Chinese in Belarus. The "most prominent" Chinese language student may be Nikolay Lukashenka, the Belarusian ruler's youngest son, who gained popularity in the PRC in 2018 for his New Year's wishes.[186]

Behind the scenes: public perception vs. official display

The public perception of China's activities in Belarus, however, is still somewhat unclear. A poll from April 2021 by Chatham House suggests that 13% have a very positive and 58% a positive attitude towards China (compared to 33% very positive and 46% somewhat positive for Russia). Only 7% have negative feelings. Thus, China scores better than the EU (and also the immediate neighbours Ukraine, Poland and Latvia).[187] Another Belarusian poll indicates that between 33% (50 years and older) and 44% (30 years and younger) support more intensive economic relations with China.[188] These are remarkable results, compared to the de-facto inexistent desire for

[183] "Opening of the First Regional Confucius Institute at GSU Named After F. Skorina [in Russian]," Francisk Skorina State University Gomel, December 20, 2017, http://www.gsu.by/node/436.

[184] "Confucius Institute Opened at Brest University [in Russian]," *BelTA*, November 4, 2020, https://www.belta.by/regions/view/institut-konfutsija-otkrylsja-v-brestskom-universitete-413981-2020/.

[185] "Confucius Class Opened at Baranovichi State University [in Russian]," *BelTA*, February 11, 2021, https://www.belta.by/regions/view/klass-konfutsija-otkryli-v-baranovichskom-gosuniversitete-428093-2021/.

[186] "Nikolai Lukashenko Celebrated Independence Day along with the Country's Top Leadership [in Russian]," *Sputnik Belarus'*, July 3, 2021, https://sputnik.by/20210703/nikolay-lukashenko-naravne-s-vysshim-rukovodstvom-strany-otprazdnoval-den-nezavisimosti-1053119066.html; "Nikolai Lukashenko Wished the Chinese People a Happy New Year [in Russian]," *Sputnik Belarus'*, February 15, 2018, https://sputnik.by/20180215/nikolaj-lukashenko-kitaj-novyj-god-1033664587.html.

[187] Ryhor Astapenia, "Belarusians' Views on the Political Crisis. Results of a Public Opinion Poll Conducted between 20 and 30 April 2021," (London, Chatham House, June 2021), 16, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-06-14-belarusians-views-political-crisis.pdf.

[188] Olga Dryndova, ed., "Meinungsumfragen [in German]," *Belarus-Analysen*, no. 45 (October 31, 2019), 12-13, https://doi.org/10.31205/BA.045.01.

closer relations with China among the urban youth, as presented above already.

With China's expansion into the Belarusian economy, workers from the PRC permanently or temporarily resettle to Belarus (about 4,300 in 2019).[189] Not surprisingly, the Region of Minsk, where the *Great Stone Industrial Park* is located, has the highest Chinese population (about 3,500 in 2019).[190] A few people are reportedly spreading the fear of Belarus becoming a "White China,"[191] that is, the Chinese replacing Belarusians.[192] By and large, Chinese and Belarusians come along nicely, as the almost complete lack of reports on (major) conflicts with Chinese immigrants shows. Even when, in 2015, during a protest over outstanding wages, some 200 Chinese workers clashed with Belarusian police in Dobrush, there was solidarity from the local Belarusian population.[193]

Unfortunately, there is still a lack of reliable data, if it exists at all. And as other experts noted already, often propaganda instead of facts dominate the discussion.[194] Hence, the actual societal effects of China's presence in Belarus cannot be comprehensively assessed here. Moreover, it remains unclear what Tsikhamirau intended when he emphasised that in contrast to the positive official accounts of the partnership with China, the "Belarusian society had other assessments of the results achieved."[195]

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189 "The Number of Foreigners Coming to Belarus for Work Is Growing [in Russian]," *Sputnik Belarus'*, February 3, 2020, https://sputnik.by/20200203/Rastet-kolichestvo-inostrantsev-kotorye-edut-v-Belarus-rabotat-1043857310.html.

190 "More than 3.5 Thousand Chinese Came to Work in Belarus in 2019 [in Russian]," *Telegraf.By*, January 27, 2020, https://telegraf.by/in-belarus/v-2019-goda-v-belarus-na-rabotu-priehalo-bolee-3-5-tysyach-kitajcev/.

191 Using the term "Belokitaj"/"Belakitaj", a portmanteau from "Belarus" and "Kitaj" (en. China), for an online search with yandex.ru delivers 639/263 results.

192 Alexander Shapovsky, "Belarus - China: What Is a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership? [in Russian]," *MLYN.BY - Novosti Minskoj Oblasti [News from the Region of Minsk]*, February 2, 2021, https://www.mlyn.by/novosti/2021/02/belarus-kitaj-chto-takoe-vsestoronnee-strategicheskoe-partnerstvo/.

193 Claire Bigg, "'Crushed Like Ants:' Chinese Workers Meet Harsh Reality In Belarus," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 21, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/chinese-workers-belarus/27141591.html.

194 Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 7; Astapenia, "Belarusian-Chinese Relations."

195 Tsikhamirau, "China as a Foreign Policy Priority," 86.

Conclusion

This paper analysed the China-Belarus comprehensive strategic partnership in four different areas of cooperation: political, economic, military, and societal-cultural. Prior research focused primarily on Sino-Belarusian relations' political and economic aspects, providing a point of departure for the present paper. Unfortunately, most analyses of the Belarusian-Chinese partnership suffer from a lack of reliable data. However, China's growing importance makes an assessment of its relations with the European neighbourhood inevitable to formulate a common EU strategy. Moreover, as the case of Belarus shows, in the geopolitical competition over the "in-between countries" (Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova), Russia, Europe and the United States are not the sole players on the ground. The People's Republic of China is gradually entering the game.

The first section on the political relationship recapitulated the origins of the very close and amicable relations between Belarusian ruler Aljaksandr Lukashenka and China's President Xi Jinping. Besides personal affections, Belarus provides a geographically advantageous position for China's Belt-Road Initiative (BRI). The country is currently the most reliable land route along the Silk Road Economic Belt. However, its role is dependent on Russia's goodwill,[196] and – as a Russian expert maintains – Poland.[197] Nonetheless, Belarus (except for Russia) has the nominally best relationship with the PRC of all countries in the region. Its status, however, is threatened as a result of EU sanctions against the regime in Minsk following the 2020 crisis. An internationally fully integrated Belarus is much more interesting for Beijing in any field of cooperation than the continuation of the Lukashenka regime.[198] In addition, China accepted Russia's predominance in the Belarusian question. China, for the moment, has only economic and no strategic ambitions. Therefore, any resolution of the crisis would most likely serve China's interests as long as it ensures Belarus' stability and a predictable foreign policy.[199] Similarly, the Sino-Belarusian relations are a welcome propaganda tool in China, regardless of their real success.[200] For Lukashenka,

196 Brona, "Curious Timing."
197 Kashin, "Myth about the Special Relationship."
198 Interview with Minsk-based China expert.
199 Sivitsky, "Belarus-China strategic partners;" Carlson, "Why China."
200 Jakóbowski and Kłysiński, *Non-Strategic Partnership*, 11.

however, China is a pillar of the Belarusian "multi-vector" foreign policy and a welcome partner in defending his "sovereignty."

The second sections turned to the economic relationship. Predictability and finding a way out of the political isolation is directly linked to regaining access to the European markets. Connectivity with surrounding markets in the EU and the EAEU is vital for Sino-Belarusian economic cooperation. In fact, the BRI has become the determining factor of the relations.[201] Reportedly, a Chinese expert even calls Belarus "Our Pakistan in Europe" for its extraordinary openness to the Initiative.[202] The *Great Stone Industrial Park* has become a decent success for both countries, with considerable potential for the future. In contrast, the trading partner Belarus is of no actual worth to China. The trade balance is negative. Belarus is primarily a source of potash fertilisers and some food products, while China sells refined products, machinery and high-tech equipment.

Moreover, Belarus is trying to modernise its economy with Chinese help and attract more foreign direct investments. However, as structural and ideological problems prevent close cooperation, Belarus cannot use China's great potential without internal reforms.

Cooperation in the military-technical field is limited. The joint production of the multiple rocket launcher *Polonez* is the greatest success in this sector. However, as mentioned in the third section, Belarus has established close ties with the Peoples' Liberation Army to educate soldiers and officers at military academies and in joint training. China, furthermore, delivers free military aid from time to time, although the equipment provided is inferior to domestic Belarusian products.

The social and cultural cooperation is tackled upon in the fourth section. For example, Lukashenka declared its intent to disseminate Chinese culture in Belarus in several documents, most notably his Presidential Decree from 2015. Moreover, the exchange of students and youth is working, but the

[201] Braga and Sangar, "Strategy Amidst Ambiguity."
[202] Jakóbowski, "'Iron Brotherhood'."

actual numbers are relatively low. Nevertheless, China is very present in Belarus. Confucius institutes or classes exist in every regional centre.

However, it is relatively unclear what the broader public in Belarus thinks of cooperation with China. As Tsikhamirau argues that since the bilateral dialogue intensified from 2015, the Belarusian leadership had grounds to "positively assess the effectiveness of the Chinese vector of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, although Belarusian society had other assessments of the results achieved."[203] Likewise, a recent opinion poll among Belarusian youths shows that only 3.6% want closer relations with China.[204] In contrast, another survey found that 71% of Belarusians have very or somewhat positive feelings for China.[205]

In conclusion, it can be noted that, first of all, both partners use the Sino-Belarusian strategic partnership to their own benefit. China does not follow a comprehensive integrational strategy but takes advantage of Belarus' openness to cooperation. As a result, China is neither motivated to invest politically in the country nor to risk its more critical relationships with Russia and ultimately with the EU over the political crisis caused by Lukashenka. On the other hand, Belarus is seeking investments and support from China. From Lukashenka's point of view, however, most importantly, no sovereign Republic of Belarus could exist without Chinese support, but it is clear that this would not be the case in reality. Finally, China remains an important political actor, a potent partner for the modernisation of Belarus' economy, but also a distant partner with interests rather than a close friend. More important for Belarus and Europe's security are Russia's plans for the future of the country.

[203] Tsikhamirau, "China as a Foreign Policy Priority," 86.
[204] Krawatzek, *Youth in Belarus*, 22.
[205] Astapenia, "Belarusians' Views on the Political Crisis," 28.

Ambitions without Direction: a Short Remark on Turkey-China Relations

Walter Posch

GR.Stocks/Shutterstock.com

Turkey-China relations are contradictory; on the one hand, there is a huge potential for deepening bilateral relations, starting with economic relations and reaching even into the military sphere; on the other hand, Ankara faces geographic and, most importantly, also political constraints such as the question of China's Muslim Turkic Uygur (also Uyghur) minority and Turkey's NATO anchor in the West. Furthermore, neither side seems to be sure how exactly it sees these relations develop.

Until recently, Chinese affairs did not figure prominently as a research field within Turkish academia. For instance, Baskın Oran's standard work on

Turkish Foreign Policy does not mention relations with China at all.[1] It was only after 2010, when a trove of publications – scholarly and journalistic – became publicly available. This is no coincidence, because at that point in time relations would intensify and gain a new quality.[2]

Developing relations

Official Chinese-Turkish relations started formally in 1927. Two years later, the first Turkish consulate was opened in Nanjing, the capital of Nationalist China. A Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1934 but in general, bilateral relations were on a very low level, both economically and politically.[3] Like most other countries, Turkey would not recognize the communist People's Republic of China in 1949 but continued to view Taiwan as the sole representative of China until 1971.

World War II – 1971

After World War II, Turkey gave up its strict neutrality, which was at the core of the classic Kemalist understanding of foreign policy, enshrined in Atatürk's slogan "Peace at home, peace in the world". Because of its ambitions to join NATO, the new government under Adnan Menderes joined the American war effort in Korea (1950-1953), where Turkish troops came into direct contact with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). Known to NATO in 1952 and following a staunch anti-communist foreign

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1 Baskın Oran (Ed.), Türk Dış Politikası. Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne, Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, 3 vols. İstanbul 2004-2013.

2 For this short paper we utilised the following sources: Zekeriyya Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," Hafıza. *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 1.1 (December 2019), 40-57; Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Tek Taraflı Aşk mı?" *Ortadoğu Analiz*, 4.45 (September 2012), 53-66; Cemre Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," in: Merthan Dündar and Gürhan Kirilen (Eds.), *APAM Çin Çalışmaları (I), Tarih, Edebiyat, Ekonomi, Uluslararası İlişkileri*, Ankara 2021, 53-70; see also the very useful draft (taslak) of TASAM's strategic report on Turkish-Chinese relations post-Covid. TASAM (Ed.), *Türkiye-Çin Etki Analizi Karşılaştırmalı Araştırma Projesi ve Çalıştayı*, İstanbul 2021, https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/59730/turkiye_-_cin_kovid-19_sonrasi_yeni_paradigmalar_kusak_ve_yol_ticaret_turizm_yatirim_finans_ve_teknoloji_rapor.

3 Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 42.

policy agenda, Turkey joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO or Baghdad Pact), an anti-Soviet regional setup among Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Chairman Mao criticized CENTO together with SEATO and NATO as "imperialist groupings" and hence regarded their constituent member states as hostile nations. At this point the nadir of Turkey-Chinese relations was reached. Things started to change with the coup d'état of May 1960 in Turkey, when the Chinese press identified the left-leaning coup in Ankara as the beginning of a "real revolutionary and populist period". A while later, in 1965, party-chairman Zhou Enlai mentioned that there was no reason for Turkey and China not to have bilateral relations – after all, both were Asian nations and shared longstanding historic and cultural relations. From Turkey's perspective, maintaining the status quo of bilateral relations with China did not really make sense any longer. After all, unlike the Soviet Union, communist China did not pose a direct security threat and Ankara's frustration over its Western allies' position on Cyprus was widespread throughout the administration and the populace. Thus, in 1963-64, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara gave the recognition of the People's Republic of China some thought. These attempts were soon to be scuttled, when in 1965 the conservative *Adalet* Party came to power and followed a staunch anti-communist foreign policy in line with US global strategic designs. Even so, the small thaw in relations did bear fruit as in 1966 an unofficial Chinese trade delegation visited Turkey. Until 1971, bilateral relations between Turkey and the People's Republic of China largely remained at that level.[4]

1971 – 1990

This changed dramatically in 1971, when the People's Republic became the sole representative of China within the United Nations. Following US lead, Ankara too recognized Beijing and downgraded its relations with the National Chinese authorities in Taiwan. What had been thought to be a pragmatic and non-partisan foreign policy measure soon turned out to become a toxic issue of domestic politics; because in 1971, the military forced the ruling *Adalet Partisi* out of office, whilst it was still the strongest party in parliament. Embittered, *Adalet*, now in opposition, would block any motion of the weak government appointed by the military. Yet, this was more than

[4] Ibid., 42-44.

only ordinary filibustering. From this juncture in its history (1971) until the coup of September 12, 1980, Turkey lived through a phase of bitter political turmoil. What started as a left-inspired students' movement in 1968 became a strong leftist insurgency towards the end of the decade, when combating communist underground movements would control whole shantytowns, often fighting over them with fascists or among themselves. The first peak of leftist violence occurred in 1971-73; hence, *Adalet* and other right-wing parties would vociferously oppose any move towards rapprochement with communism for ideological reasons; including bilateral relations with China.

Maoist side-show

This being said, Turkey's security establishment was very well aware of the fact that China, unlike the Soviet Union, which used Syrian intelligence in order to manipulate certain leftist extremist groups and to also utilize them against NATO targets inside Turkey, would stay aloof from domestic Turkish affairs and shunned direct contacts with those "revolutionaries" (i.e. terrorists) who considered themselves to be Maoists. Maoism, like many other radical leftist ideologies, came to Turkey during the 1960s, mostly via writings translated from European languages. It never became the mainstream of Turkey's radical underground, but it preserved a surprisingly high level of violence and longevity. Until this day, Maoist groups have been active as both urban and rural guerrillas in Turkey and in Syria as well as in Greece, Austria, Germany, and to a lesser degree in Switzerland and Belgium; overshadowed only by the much more famous PKK. This is not the place to detail their type of Maoism or their activities; suffice it to say that a distinction between the Maoist groups in the Turkish West of the country and the Kurdish East and Southeast has to be made because the Kurds were much more motivated by anti-Sovietism and some Kurdish Maoists such as the "Kawa" movement would criticize the Chinese for their own imperialism in Africa[5] – already in 1977! Furthermore, Turkish Maoism split after the fall of the "Gang of Four" and the promotion of China as a guardian of the "Third World". Thus, several small pro-Albanian (hoxhaist, i.e. followers of the Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha) guerrilla-parties (or armed political sects) emerged; many of them still exist today as both legal and illegal

[5] Cemil Gündoğan, *Kawa Davası Savunması ve Kürtlerde Siyasi Savunma Geleneği*, İstanbul 2007, 27, 28.

political outlets in Turkey and abroad. In short, when the Turkish government finally recognized the People's Republic as sole representative of China and bilateral relations were formally established in 1971, Ankara wasn't able to exploit these relations beyond the existing low level of trade contacts.

After the coup

Things changed with the military coup d'état in 1980. Again, it was frustration with Western allies – this time their criticism of the country's abysmal human rights record and the European Community's lacklustre embrace of Turkey - which increased the willingness to engage with China. Furthermore, after the Chinese-Vietnamese War in 1979, Beijing's relations with Moscow deteriorated further and China was eager to intensify its diplomatic relations with the Soviet neighbourhood. A final push-factor towards stronger relations was the economy. Both countries struggled to integrate their state-run or state-dominated economies in the global economic and financial system and therefore looked for new markets. Thus, a combination of economic, diplomatic but also political rationales resulted in a new agreement on trade, industry, and technological cooperation. It was not without irony that the first official state visit to communist China was undertaken in 1982 by President Kenan Evren, who as Chief of the General Staff undertook the hitherto bloodiest military coup d'état in Turkish history in 1980, which literally broke the back of the armed leftist opposition. A year later, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian visited Turkey. In the final press conference, he and his counterpart stressed common Chinese-Turkish security interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union's imperialist designs. From this point onwards, bilateral relations were intensified on many levels, such as state visits,[6] city partnerships, and cultural and technical cooperation. Finally, in 1989, Turkish-Chinese relations peaked with the signing of a bilateral consular agreement.

[6] Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 46, is right when he describes the 1980s as the golden age of Turkish-Chinese relations, the list of state visits after Evren and Xiaqian is indeed impressive. 1984: Chinese State Minister Li Xiannian, 1985: Prime Minister Turgut Özal, and President of Parliament, Necmettin Karaduman (2 separate visits), 1986: Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang, 1988: Minister for Culture, Wang Meng, 1988: Tourism and Cultural Minister Tınaz Titiz.

1990 – 2010

With the end of the Soviet Union, Turkish-Chinese relations lost an important factor of their strategic rationale. Furthermore, China faced Western sanctions after it oppressed the 1989 students' protests. This circumstance made intensifying bilateral relations less attractive for Ankara. Both sides would even compete strategically in the former Soviet Union's newly independent Central Asian republics. The half serious, half propaganda slogan of a "Turkish world from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall" provoked the Chinese much more than Turkey had expected. Propaganda aside, Turkey's enthusiastic policy towards Central Asia was an even greater concern for China. Ankara reverted soon to its old role as a strong ally of the USA and Washington backed Turkey's policies and presence there, presenting it as a role model for the newfound independent Central Asian Turkic republics. Turkey's – and the USA's and the EU's – attempts to fill the post-Soviet security gap in Central Asia became a security concern of China, which feared a spillover effect to its Western provinces. Yet, despite competition in Central Asia and propagandistic irritations, Turkey and China signed an "Agreement on Judicial Arbitration in Legal, Commercial and Criminal Matters" and in 2002 an "Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Transnational Crime". Before that, in 1992 and in May 1995, President Süleyman Demirel visited China, obviously in order to put bilateral relations back on track. China became even more important after the disappointing 1997 Luxembourg Summit, where Turkey did not achieve EU candidate status. Thus, Turkey deliberately looked at Eastern Asia and early the next year, in 1998, Foreign Minister İsmail Cem visited China and both sides agreed on intensifying economic relations.[7]

East-Turkistani irritations

Yet, in the 1990s, Turkey lived through a wave of ultra-nationalism with pan-Turanist characteristics, something every politician with nationalist credentials must take into account. Indeed, the role of the ancient Turks such as the Liao-Kıtan Empire in China and the presence of a sizeable Turkish-Muslim minority inside China are recurrent tropes in pan-Turanist discourses, which usually get stronger within the Turkish public when

[7] Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 42.

frustration with the Europeans rises. Hence, when in 1998 deputy Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit visited China, he stated that for Turkey, Europe is not the whole world and Turkey entered a phase of discovering its own Asian roots.[8] Quite interestingly, this line of argumentation dovetails with Zhu Enlai's arguments in the 1960s! Yet, historic and cultural bonds with China are not an issue of ancient or pre-modern history. The Muslim Turkish Uygur minority would become a recurrent irritant to Chinese-Turkish relations.

In 1992, President Turgut Özal took the unusual step to welcome exiled Uygur leader İsa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-1995), a former Guomindang politician and Chinese diplomat who had lived in Turkey since 1954 and was active in pan-Turkish circles. According to Alptekin, the liberation of East-Turkistan (Xinjiang) should follow the liberation of West-Turkistan (former Central Asian Soviet republic).[9] Yet, it is hard to believe that Özal had more in mind than paying lip service to the ultra-nationalist and pan-Turanist sentiments in Turkey. As a matter of fact, Turks from China are numerically a smaller group in Turkey than those from the Ex-Soviet Union or the Balkan Muslims; hence, they are negligible at the ballot box.[10] Valuing good relations over the mystical bond with a physically and culturally distinct group of East Asian Turks (and certainly taking into account China's fierce response to Turgut Özal), the Prime Minister of the day, Mesut Yılmaz signed a secret decree according to which public servants should view the Uygur question from the viewpoint of China's territorial integrity and discouraged ministers as well as high-ranking public servants to attend public meetings or any event organized on behalf of Eastern-Turkistan, or to get into contact with East-Turkistani immigrant societies, whose activities in Turkey Chinese authorities found so bothersome.[11] Indeed, Turkey constrained the activities of the East-Turkistani societies to such a degree

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8 Ibid., 48.

9 Ibid., 47.

10 Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 62; Whilst negligible numerically, the Uygurs and other – tiny – refugee communities from East-Turkistan were well known and polticised; for more details cf. Ingvar Svanberg, "Turkistani Refugees," in: Peter Alford Andrews, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, (Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients) 60.1, Wiesbaden 2002, 591-601.

11 Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 48.

that they preferred to relocate to Western Europe or to the USA.[12] From this point onwards, the Uygur reality was dealt with differently, as official visitors from Turkey would include China's far West (i.e. Eastern-Turkistan) in their visits to China. The first to do so was ultra-nationalist and pan-Turanist Devlet Bahçeli in his function as State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, who visited Urumqi and Kashgar during his official state visit to China in 2002.[13] The same did Abdullah Gül in 2009, when he visited China (the third Turkish President since 1982 to do so). The symbolic value of the Turkish president to visit Urumqi cannot be underestimated. However, a few months after his visit the security situation in Urumqi deteriorated dramatically. The now infamous "Urumqi incidents" were widely covered by the international media (at least as much as this was possible given the circumstances) and heavily criticized by the international community and the Turkish public and political cast alike. It was however reserved to the prime minister of the day, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to name these events in his unique hyperbolic style an "almost genocide".[14] Even so, Turkish-Chinese irritations did not last for too long and in the following year Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu would visit China again, starting his visit in the Uygur town of Kashgar, he bemoaned the incidents and the subsequent deterioration of Turkish-Chinese relations and hoped that the Uygur people could become bridge-builders between the two nations. Even more, and clearly attempting to ease his Chinese hosts, he stressed the possibility of cooperation in Central Asia. Two years later Prime Minister Erdoğan visited China ahead of a strong economic delegation, again stopping in Xinjiang (East-Turkistan) en route to Beijing.[15] Thus, Turkey was adamant not to allow the Uygur question to disturb bilateral relations. Yet, it has remained a permanent irritant, for instance in 2019, when the Western media widely covered Uygur unrest and Chinese oppression, especially the "Vocational Education and Training Camps". In Turkey, the case of famous Uygur folk singer Abdurrahman Heyit found great public interest especially in the social media, and therefore led to an official condemnation on behalf of the MoFa on the – false – grounds that the singer had died in a Chinese prison. Yet, the Chinese were

[12] Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 61; among other things, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who in 1995 as mayor of İstanbul named a park after Alptekin would tacitly change its name again a year later in 1996.

[13] Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 48.

[14] Ibid., 51.

[15] Ibid., 52.

able to produce a video of a very much alive Mr. Heyit who currently lives "happily" according to his own testimony in a "Vocational Education and Training Camp". A few months later, in July 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan argued that the different ethnic groups in Xinjiang live together – "happily".[16] Ever since, he has modified this statement depending on the circumstances. Uygur demonstrations and other anti-Chinese activism were at times accepted but time and again, Uygur activists have faced expulsion to China. Hence, it is not to be expected that the issue of China's far West (East-Turkistan, Xinjiang) and the fate of the Uygurs would disturb Turkey-China relations seriously.

More business, more problems

It goes without saying that the economy is at the very heart of bilateral Turkish-Chinese relations. In this regard, the 2000 visit of State Minister Jiang Zemin was a breakthrough. Not only did he receive the highest order of the Republic of Turkey, but his visit would also prepare the ground for Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's visit in 2002 when four important bilateral trade agreements were signed. In January 2003, after a visit to the USA, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited China in his function as Secretary General of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* talking business and infrastructure for the first time to the Chinese. However, whilst the potential of mutual benefits remains great, the risks must not be underestimated.[17]

One topic of Erdoğan's 2003 visit to Beijing was the work on the Kars-Tbilisi railroad, which Ankara wanted the Chinese to help speed up. A similar wish regarding the İstanbul-Ankara high-speed train and infrastructure investments in South-Eastern Anatolia was brought forward during the 2005 state visit of Abdullah Gül.[18] Yet, investments in the Turkish infrastructure did not develop the way Turkey had hoped for. Between 2002 and 2010, China did not conduct high-level visits to Turkey, but instead visited and invested in almost all neighbouring countries. Turkey's concerns peaked in 2010, when the Chinese leading enterprise COSCO invested in the Athenian port of Piraeus. Ankara assumed that, once operational, it would cater

16 Ibid., 53.
17 Ibid., 42.
18 Ibid., 49.

exclusively for the burgeoning Chinese – European market and thus sideline traditional economic hubs such as İstanbul and the role of Turkey as a geographic bridge from Asia to Europe.[19] China did not only question future business with Ankara, but also vital sectors such as Turkey's successful textile industry. A WTO member since 2001, China would put pressure on all developing countries due to its vast overproduction. Turkey therefore warned in 2005 that after the abolishment of the quota-system in textiles, Chinese production would lead to the loss of valuable markets for many developing countries. A fact soon to be proven true and for which China severely criticized Turkey. Another irritant was Cyprus. When Cyprus became a full EU member in 2004 in spite of the fact that the referendum on unification was rejected by the Greek side, Turkey suggested a "Taiwan" model for the island, meaning that countries should maintain economic relations with the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" modelled after the US-Taiwan relationship. It was certainly out of frustration that Ankara undertook such a maladroit diplomatic initiative, which met with fierce Chinese resistance. Expectedly, the Chinese argued that Taiwan was a Chinese province.[20] Even so, and almost expectedly, it was once again frustration with the EU when Ankara was disappointed in 2007 with the enlargement process that pushed Turkey closer to China. Another reason was the 2008 financial crisis, which forced Ankara to search for new markets. Like the Europeans, Turkey too found them in China. This came at a juncture in time, when the USA increased their presence in China's vicinity; hence, China rethought the strategic value of Western countries including Turkey.

Strategic partners? (2010 –)

Not before long, both sides tried to go back to business as usual. Already at the 2009 state visit an agreement was reached regarding Chinese tourism in Turkey, common Turkish-Chinese investments in third countries and – "to the extent it is possible" – cooperation in regional affairs, notably the Middle East.[21] However, as seen from Ankara's perspective not much seems to be possible, because China embraces an opposite position on important, if not

[19] Ibid., 50.
[20] Ibid., 42.
[21] Ibid., 51.

vital issues for Turkey such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Cyprus and Karabagh. And when Turkey lived through difficult times in Iraq after the US invasion in 2003, China was quick to cultivate relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil. In 2007, the Chinese opposed Turkish military operations against the PKK in the region.[22] The same holds true for the case of Syria where China as a matter of principle would support the government and Turkey took the side of some rebel groups.[23] But also in the UN, where both sides found common ground by insisting on "democratizing the decision-making process" but could not agree on how to do so.[24]

Even so, a further set of agreements was signed at the 2010 state visit of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Turkey in which both sides agreed on a currency SWAP, hence the use of the Turkish Lira and the Yuan as trade currencies. Furthermore, for the first time China and Turkey declared themselves "strategic partners". Two years later, China's new strongman Xi Jinping visited Turkey ahead of an economic delegation that included the CEOs of China's leading enterprises; both sides signed 28 trade and economic agreements. Erdoğan responded in kind when half a year later he brought a 300+ business delegation to China. Among other agreements, a notable one on the "Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy" was signed. In 2015, Erdoğan visited China for the first time as president and relations deepened even further with the signing of an "Intergovernmental Turkey-China Cooperation Committee" in 2016. Later the same year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi participated at a meeting in the framework of the "Chinese-Turkish Foreign Ministers' Consultation Mechanisms". Further steps were taken in the years 2017-2020, such as the signing of a "Cultural Exchange Program" and an "Action Plan for the Development of Mutual Trade Cooperation and Investment".[25]

Yet in spite of all the intensifying economic and political cooperation agreements and the obvious high esteem in which Xi Jinping and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hold each other, pertinent questions remain. To begin with, on the strategic level cooperation is uneasy to say the least. Regarding Central

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22 Çolakoğlu, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri," 58.
23 Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 54.
24 Ibid., 53.
25 Ibid., 52.

Asia the involvement of Pakistan, China's old ally, as a catalyst for common projects has been suggested, without much of a result. Even worse, China together with Russia seems to keep Turkey at bay given the fact that almost all Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) plus India and Pakistan (since 2017) are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).[26] Turkey was granted observer status at the 2012 SCO summit in Beijing. In 2016, frustrated with the lack of progress regarding Turkey's EU accession process, Erdoğan would float the idea of abandoning the membership process altogether and to apply for full membership at the SCO. Clearly responding to Turkey's frustration with the EU, the SCO granted Turkey the chair of the SCO's energy club for the year 2017 as a first non-member. Panicking American reactions were for fear that Turkey could be lost to China.[27] However, no further steps towards full SCO membership have been undertaken. But given the SCO's anti-NATO and anti-EU character, Turkey will not become a full member at all.[28] Apparently, Turkey's flirt with the SCO does not give Ankara the necessary leverage towards the Europeans. A short examination of economic and military relations confirms the impression of Turkish-Chinese affairs being rather to Beijing's advantage.

More of the same: Belt and Road

China's Belt and Road Initiative allowed for ever closer economic cooperation. The said initiative is basically a huge investment program in transit infrastructure covering land, sea, and air routes. Ultimately, so it is said, a huge zone of free trade and production from China to Europe should emerge. The size and the interlinked nature of these projects need much high-level political coordination.[29] Thus, President Erdoğan participated at

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[26] The SCO has eight full members: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (all since 1996), plus Usbekistan (since 2001) and India and Pakistan (since 2017); four observer states, namely Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia and six dialogue partners, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey. See http://eng.sectsco.org.

[27] Lina Wang, "Will Turkey Join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization instead of the EU?" *The Diplomat*, November 4, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/will-turkey-join-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-instead-of-the-eu.

[28] Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 62.

[29] Ibid., 64.

the first "Belt and Road Forum", and in 2017, Turkey participated at ministerial level. Erdoğan had another possibility to meet with Xi Jinping at the 2019 Osaka G-20 summit, when they debated further security and strategic cooperation and Erdoğan spoke in favour of the Belt and Road Initiative, showing a great interest in G5 and "smart cities" cooperation.[30]

Turkey initially participated only in one of the six "cooperation corridors" of the Belt and Road Initiative, namely the "Transcaspian" corridor connecting China via Central Asia, the Caucasus, Anatolia and the Balkans to Europe. In a first phase, this corridor connects Turkey by train via Georgia to Azerbaijan and by the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In 2019, business was started using the Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railroad. A first Chinese freight train passed İstanbul via the "Marmaray route", which connects the Asian and the European part of the town via the famous rail-tunnel under the Bosporus. For the future planners hope Chinese freight trains will pass via Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey through the Balkans, Hungary and Slovakia up to the Czech Republic, right to the heart of Europe. Yet, Ankara is also active in the "middle corridor" connecting China with Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.[31] It is not clear yet, whether the "middle corridor" is the very geo-strategic angle of Ankara's 2021 decision to stay in Afghanistan, or whether this decision is solely related to US-Turkish bilateral relations.

A key financial and political instrument for the Belt and Road Initiative is the "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank" (www.aiib.org). With 30%, China holds the lion's share of this bank, founded in 2015 with a capital of 100 billion USD and operational since 2016. Turkey was also one of its founding members and, after Indonesia and India, is the third-biggest receiver of the AIIB's financial investments. From 2016 to 2021, the bank invested 1.4 billion USD in various Turkish projects, such as the Tuz Gölü Natural Gaz Depot Enlargement Project, the Turkish Industrial Development Bank's Renewable Energy Project, and infrastructural credits.[32] Impressive as these numbers are, geography cannot be ignored and the proximity to Europe pays handsomely off in transport costs, something even the best high-speed train

30 Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 53.
31 Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 65.
32 Ibid., 64.

from China cannot overcome. Furthermore, Turkey still runs a chronic deficit in its trade balance with China. In 2018, Turkish exports numbered roughly 3 billion USD compared to almost 21 billion USD imports from China resulting in a negative balance of almost 18 billion USD. Numbers aren't any better for the following year, although the deficit is slightly smaller but still 15.9 billion in China's favour.[33] A comparison with Germany sheds some light on the one-sided nature of trading with China: imports from both countries were about 18 billion USD in 2019 but exports to Germany numbered 16 billion USD, whereas exports to China were about 2.5 billion USD.[34] Turkey exports mostly raw materials to China but imports high quality technology products such as computers, mobile phones and cameras. In addition, China's main investments are in energy, infrastructure, finance, mining, telecommunication and husbandry. Even so, Chinese direct investments are about 1.5% of all foreign direct investments compared to the Netherlands (15.7%), Spain and Germany (both 6.1%), Luxembourg (6.2%) or some other European countries.[35] In short, economic relations to China bear fantastic promises for the future, but meagre yields for the present.

Military relations

Military affairs, generally regarded as the key element of any strategic partnership, give an equally ambiguous picture. By the mid-1990s, Turkey started to look to China as a cheap alternative for the West as a provider of military hardware and equipment. First talks about Turkey's wish to buy Chinese arms were tabled on the occasion of an official visit of Chief of the General Staff Hakkı Karadayı in 1997. How much China values relations with the Turkish military can be seen in the fact that Karadayı was received by President Jiang Zemin and Defence Minister Chi Haotian.[36] Yet, the first real step towards cooperation in the arms industry took place a year earlier in 1996 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the acquisition of Chinese WS-1 missiles worth 150 million USD, which also

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33 For statistics on the Turkey-China trade balance see TASAM, *Türkiye-Çin Etki Analizi*, 5 (years 2013-2019) and Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 63 (years 2007-2018).

34 TASAM, *Türkiye-Çin Etki Analizi*, 9, 10.

35 Ibid., 5, 6.

36 Çolakoğlu, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri," 56.

included the prospect of common production in Turkey. Not much has matured out of this intention; thus, in 2001 Chief of the General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu visited China, adamant to overcome shortcomings in their cooperation and to expand existing projects[37] – presumably in the arms industry but not much is known about the nature of these "shortcomings". High-level military contacts continued though; in 2005, General İbrahim Fırtına, head of the Turkish Air Force, visited China. The Turkish side's demands are proof of Ankara's greater strategic vision: the general's wish list included cooperation in mid-range air defence systems, space technology including terrestrial space stations, satellite launch facilities and reconnaissance satellites. These topics – cooperation in air defence and space – were brought up again in the 2006 visit of the head of the Chinese Air Force, General Qiao Qingchen. Two years later, the Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie thanked the Turkish Commander of the Air Force, General Aydoğan Babaoğlu for Turkey's commitment to China's territorial integrity[38] - meaning Ankara's silence regarding the Uygurs – but not much has been published about military cooperation in the context of this visit. Even so, military relations continued. The Chinese Air Force was invited to the annual "Anatolian Eagle" exercise in 2010 as the only partner. This was a remarkable decision given that NATO allies would traditionally join the exercise. Thus, crossing Pakistani and Iranian airspace, Chinese fighter jets trained together with the Turkish Air Force's F-4s.[39] Following this spirit of ever closer cooperation, Turkey issued a tender for its new air defence systems in 2013, which China won. Yet, the decision to buy and then to integrate Chinese long-range missiles into a NATO system soon met with resistance and in 2017 Ankara skipped the contract – but decided for a Russian system two years later. This system too met its less than glorious end in 2020. It is thus unlikely that intensifying cooperation with China should somehow balance the acquisition of the S-400 air defence system, telling Moscow that Turkey has more options than just Russia or the West.[40] Military cooperation seems to remain somehow limited in spite of the alleged strategic partnership, although only Chinese observers were invited to the

37 Ibid., 57.
38 Ibid., 58.
39 Akdağ, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi," 51.
40 Ibid., 54.

"Efes 2018" exercises that year in İzmir.[41] Even so, Turkey would not give up easily on China, although China seems to be rather reluctant when it comes to technology transfer. In 2021, news was published according to which Ankara plans to cooperate more closely with Pakistan in the field of arms procurement and production. Allegedly, Turkey wants this cooperation for its own *Siper* missile system and the TF-X fighter jet and hopes to convince China via Pakistan to share its technology.[42] This is a far cry from Ankara's hopes of space cooperation with China. Even worse, cooperating with China came with a high price at times: This was the case when China bought the dilapidated Ukrainian aircraft carrier "Varyag". Bilateral diplomatic negotiations on the ship's right to passage the Turkish straits lasted three years, from 1998-2001. Finally, a modus vivendi was found according to which the Varyag passed without motors. In exchange, China made several legal, diplomatic, and economic promises including a fantastic number of 2 million Chinese tourists annually – who never showed up. But the "Varyag" would trouble diplomatic waters: Japan and the USA alerted Ankara about their fears that China would soon revamp the ship into a functioning aircraft carrier once it made landfall on its shores. – These predictions came true as the "Varyag" underwent extensive refit and became China's first aircraft carrier, the "Liaoning". Even worse, the passing of the "Varyag" – with or without motors – weakened Turkey's position regarding the Montreux convention, which regulates the passage of third nations' (i.e. non-littoral) military vessels to the Black Sea and gave a precedent for future third nations' demands and therefore runs the risk of questioning Turkey's longstanding position on the Montreux treaty.[43] This episode is as exemplary as the common Turkish-Chinese military exercises for the nature of their bilateral military relations: they did not yield the hoped-for results in technology transfer, political or military clout for Turkey.

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41 Pekcan, "Xi Jinping Dönemi Çin Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkileri," 62.

42 Selcan Hacaoğlu, "Turkey wants to tie up with Pakistan to make fighter jets, missiles and access to Chinese arms," *The Print*, March 2, 2021, https://theprint.in/world/turkey-wants-to-tie-up-with-pakistan-to-make-fighter-jets-missiles-access-chinese-tech/614564

43 Çolakoğlu, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri," 57, 58; on the Montreux Treaty and its importance for Turkey see Kudret Özersay, "Montreux Boğazlar Sözleşmesi," in: Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne: Olgular, Belgeler Yorumlar*, (vol. I 1919-1980), 370-84.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that Turkey-China relations are important from a European and transatlantic perspective, given the fact that they bring China closer to Europe. However, irritations with Ankara, notwithstanding there is no serious indication that Turkey would move strategically away from Europe or NATO, but as a sovereign country and aspiring power it shapes its relationship with the People's Republic of China on its own, according to its needs. This being said, there is of course a correlation between frustration with the West in general and the Europeans in particular, pushing Ankara closer to China. Yet, we do not think the push factor (frustration) is more important than the Chinese pull factor, namely the country's strong economy and huge market. After all, the Europeans too ushered to China after the 2008 financial crisis. In fact, economic relations between Ankara and Beijing are clearly the bedrock of a relationship dubbed "strategic" and they are not to Turkey's advantage – which does not mean that Turkey wouldn't need them! But regarding Turkey's many strategic challenges from the Middle East, the Kurdish issues or Libya do not help much, and cooperation is to be expected from the Chinese. Regarding the refugee crisis, it is the EU Ankara negotiates with, to quote but one important example. Even in Central Asia Turkey is somehow kept at bay and, worse, has to grudgingly accept widespread mistreatment of the Turkic Uygur people in China. Given the strength and the omnipresence of the Pan-Turanist narrative in Turkish society and academia, this is hard to stomach, even if the political elites shrug it off for realpolitik reasons. Finally, one observes a deepening and widening of bilateral relations but apparently without a clear strategic focus. This is even true for military relations, where Turkey wants to obtain Chinese hardware but snubbed Beijing already in 2015 when Ankara quit a signed missile deal. Maybe the issue is less strategic in nature: both countries have a long history as great empires humiliated by (Western) Europe and thus understand each other on a meta-level. Defying the West was in principle at the core of the Kemalist ideology as it was at Sun Yat-Sen's (and Mao's). Hence, both sides are very much at ease in recognizing each other's ambitions. However, as the circling of Turkey's warming up and cooling down towards China shows, there is not much of a strategic direction both sides found to go together, other than intensifying economic relations.

China on the Arabian Peninsula

Stephan Reiner

Běijīngkǎooyāmeetstayn.
(Beijing duck meets figs)

GR.Stocks/Shutterstock.com

Introduction

The Middle Kingdom and the Arabian Peninsula represent two different geographic and cultural environments that, especially from a European historical perspective, have only had few points of contact or commonalities. Nevertheless, the two areas have developed remarkable economic networks with global impacts in recent decades. While Europe cultivated intensive relations with the Orient simply because of their geographical proximity and the millennia of economic and cultural exchange, the Arab world was in

earlier centuries assumed to have only few points of contact with China and was thought to have only a selective, trade-oriented exchange.[1] Historically, a connection between the two territories was not immediately evident; even the easternmost state on the Arabian Peninsula, the former Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, was economically and politically predominantly oriented towards East Africa and India.[2] The routes of the old silk roads of the Han dynasty did not touch the Arabian Peninsula, a circumstance that superficially consolidated the European – Venetian-influenced - image that there was little Arab-Chinese trade. From a purely geographical point of view, the sea routes from the East Asian region via the Red Sea ended in present-day Alexandria and were thus considered "dead ends" from the point of view of long-distance trade.[3] The Suez Canal did not yet exist, the majority of goods and merchandise were transhipped to the Nile only and did not reach the trading centre of the kingdom of Venice via this route.[4]

Nevertheless, there was regular economic and political exchange between the Arab world and China's historical dynasties. The first contacts can be dated back to the 8th century AD.[5] With the opening of the Suez Canal, trade with the Far East naturally experienced a massive upswing, but most of it still involved European states. During the last two decades, however, the emergent China, with its export market oriented towards the West, massively changed its presence in the Middle East region in the course of global maritime trade. The following chapters provide a brief overview of China's role in the region. One section focuses on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states on the Arabian Peninsula. The focus will be on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman. These

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1 Sanam Vakil, "China & Middle East: Regional Balancing," Issue 1819, https://www.hoover.org/research/china-middle-east-regional-rebalancing.

2 Britannica, "History of Oman," https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Oman.

3 Jana Niemeyer, "Die Neue Seidenstraße Chinas und seine geopolitischen Implikationen," 2017, Kapitel 1, https://mbei.nrw/sites/default/files/asset/document/gruppenprojekt.pdf.

4 Ibid.

5 Abdulaziz Al-Helabi, et.al., *Arabia, Greece and Byzantium: Cultural Contacts in Ancient and Medieval Times*, King Saud University, 2012, 311, https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/images/stories/missions/saudi-arabia/docs/Arabia_Greece_and_Byzantium_en.pdf.

three states are representative of the abundance of Chinese investments in companies and infrastructure now characterising Arab-Chinese relations.[6]

Political dimension

With regard to the last five decades, the relationship between the states of the Middle East and the People's Republic of China can be divided into three historically distinct phases.[7]

In the 1980s, the "Cold War" and the geopolitical activities in its wake also dominated China's view of the region. This bipolar confrontation between two (ideologically) different economic systems decisively defined the relationship of the Arab states among each other and their foreign policies tailored to it. Also, the struggle for supremacy in the region defined the Arab states' mutual perception of the at the time non-aligned China. The Middle Eastern states oriented towards the Soviet Union, such as Syria or the Socialist Republic of South Yemen, viewed China primarily in the light of the communist ideology and therefore from an ideological rather than an economic-political perspective.[8]

By contrast, the Western-oriented states, such as Saudi Arabia as a close ally of the USA, but also Egypt under the then young "free officer" Hosni Mubarak, saw China primarily as an economic and political regional competitor of the USA regarding its Southeast Asia policy, and less as a potential competitor or even trading partner. In the case of Egypt, this circumstance was remarkable because it had already established official relations with Beijing through Nasser's state visit to China in 1955. Egypt also supported China's application for admission to the United Nations and,

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6 Jonathan Fulton, *The Gulf monarchies in the Belt and Road Initiative*, Chapter 6, "Domestic, regional and international pressures," 97, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429202346-6/gulf-monarchies-belt-road-initiative-jonathan-fulton.

7 Camille Lons, Jonathan Fulton, "China's Great Game in the Middle East," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2019. Policy Brief, https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/.

8 Yahya al-Awd, "Yemen-China Relations: History and Development in Bilateral Relations," *Medwell Journals*, 2017, https://medwelljournals.com/abstract/?doi=sscience.2017.1775.1794.

due to the assumption of control under international law and subsequent nationalised operation of the Suez Canal, maintained regular contacts with the People's Republic of China, increasingly generating notable income from transit fees. The latter were generated predominantly from Sino-European long-distance trade via the Red Sea route and not so much from the bilateral Sino-Egyptian trade, which was only marginally developed at the time.[9]

In the 1990s, the Arab-Chinese relationship began to change. From that point of time onwards, China also observed that the strategic regional political activities of the two major blocs in the Middle East were increasingly failing. The People's Republic of China registered the political change in relations between the USA and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia just as much as Moscow's difficulties in its newly defined foreign policy to tie in with Soviet regional policy towards the former socialist-Baathist "brother states". This operational pursuit of Russian foreign policy was most successful in Syria, where the Russian (military) presence remained unaffected by all geopolitical upheavals.[10] The USA under the Republican-dominated foreign policy of the Bush sen. administration was increasingly perceived on the "Arab street" as a "stooge and supporter of Israel" and increasingly failed in its attempts at moderating the burgeoning regional and religious fault lines. In addition, international terrorist activities had increased, entailing the early confrontational form of the later "Global War on Terrorism".[11]

From the beginning of the 2000s, the relationship between the states of the Middle East and the People's Republic of China began to change fundamentally. Under the slogan of the geopolitical "chess game" within the framework of a "multipolar world order", China's relationship with the Gulf States became more closely differentiated, especially in the socio-economic sphere. The massive increase in trade and, connected with that, the rise in strategic Chinese investments in selected infrastructure projects on the

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[9] Mohamed El-Badri, "Egypt and China: Historical relationship into the future," *The Global Times*, 2020, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1189854.shtml.

[10] Fuchang Yang, "China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years' Evolution," *Center for Strategic Studies*, China Foundation for International Studies, 6, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145.

[11] Ivan Sascha Sheehan, "Has the Global War on Terror Changed the Terrorist Threat? A Time-Series Intervention Analysis," 2019, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32:8, 743-761, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100903039270.

Arabian Peninsula met the changing economic needs of the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[12] They were increasingly confronted with the need to diversify their predominantly petrochemical-based economies. On the one hand, this was due to the decline in the price of crude oil; on the other hand, however, it was also due to the increasing ecologisation of the Western national economies, which stepped up their efforts to decouple their economic growth from crude oil consumption.[13]

For the Gulf States, China's involvement was therefore very advantageous in terms of timing and nature. For China, the lack of diversification was the most relevant connecting factor because its own economic prosperity was massively dependent on the secured supply of energy imports. Consequently, the supply met a rising demand and enabled the Gulf States to basically start their capital-intensive economic transformation.[14]

From this moment, some Gulf States regarded the Chinese approach to the region very favourably under the slogan of a "free-rider policy". In terms of regional policy, this technical term of international policy used within Arabia for China's approach is characterised by the fact that Beijing gives priority to its economic presence in the Gulf over a military one. This interpretation of the regional policy approach was also taken up and discussed in the Chinese media.[15] The form of coordinated geopolitics applied to the Gulf States represented an atmospheric novelty for them, since the decades-long intervention of foreign powers had been substantially backed by the respective military presence.[16]

Economic and diplomatic exchange with China intensified disproportionately from 2011, the year of what Western media called the "Arab Spring". Although the ruling systems of the Gulf States were spared

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12 Fulton, *The Gulf monarchies*, 97.

13 *European Economic Forecast*, Winter 2021 (Interim), Institutional Paper 144, February 2021, 8, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/ip144_en_1.pdf.

14 Lons and Fulton, "China's Great Game."

15 Jin Liangxiang, "Is China Really a Free rider in the Middle East?", *Shanghai Institute of International Studies*, Security Study, 2014, http://www.siis.org.cn/Research/EnInfo/2104.

16 Lons and Fulton, "China's Great Game."

violent upheavals in the course of the civil society protests, the autocratic Sunni monarchies were increasingly alienated from the USA in particular, but also from Europe and its unrestricted support for democratisation.[17]

A decisive factor in this development was the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, which was explicitly welcomed by the Obama administration. However, this deliberate US positioning on the side of Arab civil society came only a few weeks after a state visit by Mubarak to Washington, which had had the sole purpose of the bilateral approval of Mubarak's son Gamal succeeding his father and becoming the future president of Egypt. For the Sunni autocratic rulers in the Persian Gulf, Washington's "handshake quality" ended abruptly.[18]

Meanwhile, the economic policy of the Obama administration towards the People's Republic of China became more confrontational. The burgeoning US-Chinese rivalry was flanked by the Obama administration's publicly expressed desire to reduce its own involvement in the Middle East. This political simultaneity operated in the Obama administration under the slogan "It's the middle class, not the Middle East".[19] Obama had come under domestic political pressure at the beginning of his second term. The US import market needed a general realignment due to the abundance of Chinese products in the domestic American markets, the foreign trade deficit with China had therefore already tilted to the disadvantage of the USA and finally led to such a high level of indebtedness of the US government to Chinese creditors that public opinion saw national security at risk.[20]

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17 Riccardo Alcaro, Miguel Haubrich-Seco (ed.), "Re-Thinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprisings," *IAI Research Papers*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2012, https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/re-thinking-western-policies-light-arab-uprisings.

18 France 24, "Obama presses Hosni Mubarak to make 'right decision' and step down," issued on February 5, 2011, https://www.france24.com/en/20110205-obama-presses-hosni-mubarak-leave-office.

19 Aron David Miller, "It's the Middle Class Not the Middle East," *Wilson Center Insight & Analysis*, Washington D.C., February 2013, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/its-the-middle-class-not-the-middle-east.

20 Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Obama Administration's Strategic Rebalancing to Asia: Quo Vadis in 2017?", Strategic Rebalancing to Asia, *Pacific Focus*, De La Salle University, https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12115.

At the beginning of his second presidency, Obama's political agenda addressed the priority problems and, in turn, decided to refrain from further regulatory and resource-intensive engagement in the Middle East for financial reasons alone. This was accompanied by US entry into new petrochemical production technologies, which increasingly reduced crude oil imports from the Middle East. This reorientation of the USA proved to be the driving force for closer cooperation between the Gulf States and the People's Republic of China.[21]

In the second decade of the 21st century, the current cornerstones of the relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Gulf monarchies were formed. China sees the region as an area of geopolitical competition, characterised by an abundance of energy resources and representing a hub of global trade. Moreover, despite several economic crises and the global SARS-CoV-19 pandemic, the GCC region still provides a significant banking sector and thus has a global presence with its strong financial system. These factors outline a region that is geographically located at the centre of China's territory, sphere of influence and financially strong and affluent markets in Europe – a circumstance that is per se relevant for Chinese leaders.[22]

In return, the Gulf monarchies see the People's Republic of China as an important sales market for their petrochemical products, a potential infrastructure developer and a global power with nuclear participation and coordinated expertise in the high-tech sector. The latter also touches on the needs for knowledge transfer in the field of satellite technology and green technologies. These points of commonality are shaping a dynamic partnership, which has been given increasing freedom of action since 2017 due to the significantly decreasing US presence in the region.[23]

In the third decade of the 21st century, the People's Republic of China is beginning to replace the USA with regard to fundamental geopolitical activities as well as the financial commitment and creative will required in this context. In so doing, it disregards any politically "disrupting" interference regarding the respect for human rights and has no desire for democratisation and adherence to binding standards of the rule of law.

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21 Fulton, *The Gulf monarchies*, 100.
22 Ibid., 97.
23 Ibid.

Public opinion, civil society and the rule of law are thus blanked out to a certain extent, giving the Gulf monarchies extensive freedom of action in their project development. The Gulf monarchies (still) interpret this as their own advantage. In these aspects, China is therefore clearly perceived as a "soft power" from an Arab perspective, in contrast to the historically strained relationship with the Western states.[24]

Economic dimension

In 2016, the People's Republic of China adopted its White Paper on its relationship with the Middle East, published in English under the title of "Arab Policy Paper". This catalogue of political projects for the first time defined the strategic guidelines of an economic approach of the "Middle Kingdom" towards the partner states of the Middle East.[25] At the time of publication, the People's Republic was already importing 50% of its crude oil requirements from these states. Three years later, the gas market opened up and with it the LNG-based Chinese industry, which from then on was already importing around 30% of the annually globally available natural gas for its home markets alone. The People's Republic of China is thus the world's largest user of petrochemical products from abroad in general, and from the Gulf region in particular, alongside Japan, which has to cover 90% of its energy needs from imports, and India, 60% of whose imports have to come from abroad.

The import markets from the Gulf region are currently as follows:

- China obtains about 16% of its national demand for crude oil from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- The Kingdom is closely followed by the Arab Republic of Iraq, which is responsible for 10% of imports.
- The Sultanate of Oman with 8%
- and the Emirate of Kuwait with 6% are two further GCC states.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran is also relevant; with a 7% share of Chinese imports, it supplies more crude oil than Kuwait.

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[24] Vakil, "China & Middle East."

[25] Scott N. Romaniuk, "China's 'Arab Pivot' Signals the End of Non-Intervention; China's interests in the Middle East may lead Beijing to assume a military role in the affairs of Arab states," December 20, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/chinas-arab-pivot-signals-the-end-of-non-intervention/.

From an internal Arab perspective, unrestricted availability for the Chinese energy market is a necessary prerequisite for the country's own diversification. The revenues thus generated enable the cost-intensive restructuring of national economic systems. In return, the unrestricted supply of energy to China represents an essential contribution to its national security. This "win-win situation" makes it politically easy to win the national Arab markets of the GCC states over for Chinese investments and to receive priority over international competitors. Since 2017, Chinese direct investments have represented a disproportionately high volume of foreign direct investments in the GCC economic area with a share of around 30%.

These developments within the GCC economic community gained momentum due to several events. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was launched in 2013, and the first concrete steps in its operational implementation relevant to the GCC states were published two years later by the Chinese People's Congress in its white paper entitled "Vision and Implementation".

Going by the title "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", the long-term strategy for a permanent Chinese presence in the Gulf region was finally presented. This first vision addresses the GCC states on several levels.

The first level concerns the economic area per se and its aforementioned geographical location. The second level focuses on bilateral activities with the individual GCC states. The BRI thus also takes into account the competitive situation of the individual states of the Gulf region and their different speeds in the respective economic diversification.

In recent years, all Gulf States have presented their diversification plans in order to convert from predominantly petrochemical rentier states to sustainable economic models for their own populations. The PRC's approach meets the Saudi "Vision 2030", the "New Kuwait 2035", the "Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030", the "Qatar Vision 2030", the "Oman Vision 2040" and finally the Bahraini "Vision 2030".[26]

[26] Martin Hvidt, "The Development Trajectory of the GCC States: An Analysis of Aims and Visions in Current Development Plans," May 2021, 18, https://doi.org/10.1142/9789814566209_0002.

What all visions have in common is that they leave the political system untouched and focus exclusively on economic transformation. In addition, the common feature of all visions is that they are propagated under the Christian calendar and do not succeed under the Islamic calendar. Even Saudi Arabian newspapers do not write about the "Vision 1451 AH". To put this into perspective, it should be noted that the Gregorian calendar had prevailed in the Muslim world in all economic matters since 1927. Nevertheless, it is a socio-political and religio-political symbol of change, since e.g. Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia is accompanied by far-reaching reforms that also shake the foundations of Wahhabi life (driving licence for women etc.). China's seemingly "non-ideological" and predominantly "non-denominational" attachment to these reform plans is favoured by these circumstances.[27]

The second level of China's approach was touched by an intra-Arab crisis around the Emirate of Qatar from 2017. Internal disputes with the Saudi Arabian crown prince as well as the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates concerning the Qatari ruling family and its alleged support for various terrorist groups escalated and ultimately led to sanctions against GCC-member Qatar, formulated by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates and enforced by the GCC. Qatar's membership was then "suspended". However, this intra-Arab crisis also touched on international politics because the then US President Trump sided with Saudi Arabia relatively early and had to spend a relatively long time trying to find a diplomatic balance after this public declaration. The USA maintains one of the largest air force bases on Qatari territory, which is relevant to the operational approach of the US Central Command's (CENTCOM), the highest command in the region.[28]

In the short term, these developments also had a negative impact on Sino-Qatari relations, which can be described as very close, especially in the LNG segment. Exports from the Qatari economic zones were also made more

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[27] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Mohammed bin Salman and Religious Authority and Reform in Saudi Arabia," September 2019, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/mbs-political-religious-authority-saudi-arabia/.

[28] Christopher Woody, "Trump: The US is ready to leave one of its most important military bases if the Gulf crisis worsens," July 2017, https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-us-is-ready-to-leave-al-udeid-military-base-amid-gulf-crisis-2017-7.

difficult for China by a general GCC blockade policy. However, China's strict policy of non-interference, coupled with a very pragmatic access to the other trading partners in the Gulf, enabled a relatively quick continuation of the set projects and provided Qatar with economic leeway during the US-Saudi negotiation rounds. Further Chinese investments were also arriving in the United Arab Emirates at the time. The network-like linking of the individual infrastructure investments within the framework of the BRI, as well as the political maxim of strict non-interference on the part of the Chinese leadership, thus had an indirect de-escalating effect. The intra-Arab crisis was officially declared over in January 2021.[29]

In addition to a wealth of infrastructure investments and smaller projects outside of media coverage, several large special economic projects stand out, especially in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman. In 2018, further expansion stages and, in some cases, an expansion of investments were agreed within the framework of the Sino-Arab Economic Cooperation Forum in Beijing.[30]

The three relevant "lighthouse projects" for China's approach in the region are distributed among the three relevant GCC states. The projects are located in Saudi Arabia, in the United Arab Emirates and in the Sultanate of Oman, respectively. Specifically, the first project mentioned is the "Jazan City for Primary and Downstream Industries" (JCPDI) in the southwest of Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea. The strategically favourable location on the main shipping route to Europe is also used by the Saudi Arabian state petrochemical company ARAMCO. The favourable climate in the region also enables the Kingdom to massively expand agriculture. This makes the project strategically relevant for both the People's Republic of China and the

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[29] Mohammed Turki al-Sudairi, "Why Beijing is Lying Low in the GCC Crisis?", November 2018, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 7, https://kfcris.com/pdf/bb7af816f4265c381c3431b14526b0115de8ac893cfbc.pdf.

[30] Clara Giffoni, et.al., *The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF)* fact sheet outlines the international cooperation between China and the Arab League countries promoted by the China Arab States Cooperation Forum, BRICS policy center, https://bricspolicycenter.org/en/publicacoes/the-china-arab-states-cooperation-forum-cascf/.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, because it encompasses several sectors of the economy.[31]

Among China's investments in the United Arab Emirates, the "Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi; KIZAD" stands out. It is the largest commercial platform of the 34 or so commercial zones in the UAE and is located in the north-east of the emirate of Abu Dhabi on the border with Dubai. As of 2019, more than twenty Chinese companies maintain permanent representative offices in the industrial zone. This zone has become one of the most important Chinese landing points for GCC goods transhipment in the Persian Gulf, with its deep-sea port and several rail and highway access points.[32]

As far as the Sultanate of Oman is concerned, the "China-Oman Industrial Park" in Duqmum is one of the People's Republic's larger investments in the GCC space in the Arabian Peninsula's largest free trade zone. The industrial park itself is located about 550 km south of the Omani capital of Muscat and measures about 2,000 km^2. The enclosed coastline to the Arabian Sea is around 80 km and enables the landing of ocean-going merchant and container ships. The industrial park was established in 2011, and since the Sino-Omani agreement of 2016, around 12.7 km^2 of land have been developed by several Chinese investors and consortia. China committed to an investment volume of around € 9 billion, until the completion of the BRI within the framework of several investment agreements.[33]

Apart from these infrastructure projects, various bilateral state oil production cooperations were also ratified. China's state-owned SINOPEC, for example, entered into notable partnerships with Saudi Arabia's ARAMCO, as well as with Kuwait's state-owned oil company. The latter has an annual turnover of € 12.2 billion.

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[31] "Jazan City for Primary and Downstream Industries; Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu manages and operates its forth [sic!] city – Jazan City for Primary and Downstream Industries – the future zone for international investment," https://www.refiningandpetrochemicalsme.com/article-18199-jazan-city-for-primary-and-downstream-industries.

[32] "Chinese companies invest Dh602b in KIZAD; Tyre manufacturer Roadbot to set up facility in Abu Dhabi industrial complex," July 2019, https://gulfnews.com/uae/chinese-companies-invest-dh602b-in-kizad-1.65353433.

[33] Ed.: Yan, "Spotlight: China, Oman establish industrial park to boost bilateral cooperation," December 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/19/c_137683272.htm.

Military dimension

Military engagement of the People's Republic of China in the Middle East encompasses two fundamental fields of action. On the one hand, there are direct military activities; on the other hand, the BRI, as well as numerous infrastructure projects, can be attributed to military cooperation.[34]

In general, it is important to note that the sum of all China's activities in the region is always based on military-industrial considerations. In addition to the global economic aspects, China also sees the BRI as a logistics and supply initiative that is to be used as an alternative in the event of a conflict in the Western Pacific region. The essence of China's strategy aims at being able to indirectly neutralise the permanent presence of US forces in Asia and on the Indian subcontinent by military means, if necessary. This is also the reason for China's involvement in the anti-piracy operation off the Horn of Africa. On the one hand, this concrete troop presence takes place as a safeguard for the flow of trade through the Bab al-Mandab from the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden into the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal to Europe; on the other hand, it also flanks the very strong presence at the Chinese armed forces base in Djibouti. This base, known as the Chinese People's Liberation Army Base in Djibouti, contains logistics and support elements in the order of up to 2,000 personnel.[35] This comparatively small military engagement with regard to space in relation to its economic footprint follows the White Paper logic, according to which the central government in Beijing pursues strict non-interference in regional conflicts and is exclusively concerned with securing trade flows away from any "imperialist airs".

By contrast, with its arms deals China aims at interweaving the respective national armed forces on the ground with its own military-industrial complex. China's involvement can be subsumed under the catchphrase "Games of Drones", a weapon system that will have massive influence on conventional warfare in the 21st century. For the states of the Middle East, access to high technology via Chinese companies is much more comfortable.

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[34] Jonathan Fulton, "China's relations with the Arab Gulf monarchies; three case studies," 2016, University of Leicester, 17, https://figshare.com/articles/thesis/China_s_Relations_with_the_Arab_Gulf_Monarchies_Three_Case_Studies/10193954/1.

[35] Ibid., 192.

It prevents protracted political export discussions, which are usually linked to conditions and international control mechanisms. From the point of view of the Arab leaders, the influx of drones, smart weapons and satellite technology (including dual-use technologies) can thus be guaranteed without "political horse-trading". China's military engagement in these two fields of action subtly increases its classic military presence in the Middle East region. Further activities can therefore be assumed to take place.

Cultural policy dimension

Since the 1950s, there has been an internal conflict in the People's Republic of China between the genuine Han Chinese on the one hand and a Muslim minority in the west of the country on the other. The geographical area of conflict of the official provincial name Xinjiang includes the area known as the "Tarim Basin". The Uyghurs living there, a Turkmen population of Muslim faith, have for several decades unsuccessfully resisted Chinese control and the accompanying exercise of political power within the framework of a central administration. In terms of cultural history, the "Tarim Basin" is considered the cradle of the Turkic peoples and the starting point of the migration of peoples that led to the settlement of large parts of present-day Turkey. The ethnic conflict is regularly expanded to include a religious component; the Islam of the Sunni interpretation of the Hanafi school, enriched with elements of Sufism, serves as a central element of Uyghur religious identity.[36]

However, the relationship between the Gulf States and the People's Republic of China is not significantly influenced by this conflict. The official reading of Saudi Arabia focuses not so much on the religious component, but on the ethnic aspect. The kingdom's official reaction to an interview with the Chinese ambassador to Saudi Arabia during a lecture in Jeddah in January 2021 is therefore that this is a Turkmen-Chinese problem, which therefore also affects the Republic of Turkey, but not so much Saudi Arabia with its

[36] Lucille Greer, "The Chinese Islamic Association in the Arab World: The Use of Islamic Soft Power in Promoting Silence on Xinjiang," July 2020, *The Middle East Institute*, https://www.mei.edu/publications/chinese-islamic-association-arab-world-use-islamic-soft-power-promoting-silence.

economic ties to China.[37] There were no different reactions on the part of Saudi Arabian intellectuals; an analogy of the Uyghurs' liberation struggle to the Palestinians' liberation struggle against the Israeli occupying power was rejected by the Saudi Arabian royal family.[38]

This interpretation of the Uyghur conflict is the result of a targeted Chinese state information campaign, which is based on a three-stage line of argumentation. The Chinese Islamic Association, founded in 1953, is responsible for it, moderating the complex dynamics of Chinese-Arab relations in terms of realpolitik and preparing them for general perception. The Chinese practices of practising Islam are presented as a religious role model for China that is worth protecting. In addition, close contact is established and a partnership developed with Saudi Arabian religious structures within the framework of "pilgrimage diplomacy". Finally, the Sino-Islamic Association presents itself as a supporter of these religious structures in the Kingdom itself. This ultimately enables the development of the Saudi narrative of an intra-Turkish, but not Islamic problem.[39]

China can therefore isolate its internal problems from trade relations with the Arab world. Through this political strategy, it is not perceived disproportionately negatively "on the Arab street".[40]

Conclusions

China's influence in the Middle East has grown massively in recent decades. This influence is wielded primarily via inter-economic relations and large-scale infrastructure projects. China's motive for its regional commitment is the result of calculations with regard to economic policy and brought to bear under the catchphrase "Belt and Road Initiative". In addition to concrete infrastructural land connections, this global economic trade initiative requires a multitude of trade centres and economic zones to serve as connecting points for regional trade structures.

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37 بل وبهرغ السعوي قترك زعلى صالح هالوطنية أكثر من الفاع عالقضيا السالمية

38 Greer, "The Chinese Islamic Association."

39 Ibid.

40 Guy Burton, "Public Opinion in the Middle East toward China," December 2018, *The Middle East Institute*, https://www.mei.edu/publications/public-opinion-middle-east-toward-china.

Increasing interdependence also positions China as a regional political actor. Alongside the USA, Russia and the individual regional powers themselves, another global entity is thus present. However, China's approach is different due to its reliance on economic cooperation, which is preferred to political or military partnerships. This position of strict non-interference in internal Arab affairs will be undermined in the future by its economic strength and cannot be maintained, not least because of global competition. Moreover, the role of the USA in the Middle East is often "sanctions-driven" in terms of economic policy and focuses on the Islamic Republic of Iran as an adversary of Saudi Arabia. Since these two states maintain intensive economic contacts with China, the latter's "neutrality" is also at risk in the event of an Iranian-Saudi escalation. A possible repositioning of the USA therefore also has an impact on Sino-Arab relations and can exert an influence on them in individual cases.

Ultimately, China's principle of strict non-interference with the respective domestic affairs of its partner and cooperation countries constitutes an advantage, compared to the more robust and partly militarily backed approach of the USA, which also provides more opportunity for political criticism. With respect to this principle and the associated competition for spheres of influence in the South China Sea, China will continue to be under scrutiny. The Chinese People's Liberation Forces will not be able (or willing) to ignore the demands for "safe passage through Belt and Road" in the future. Therefore, China's military presence in the region is likely to increase in the medium term. The economic projects currently realised make a reduction of Chinese involvement seem almost impossible.

The People's Republic of China's Presence in Africa

Gerald Hainzl

"China-Africa ties have not grown overnight,
nor is it a gift from someone else,
but have been forged and sealed in adversity,
built on one concrete step after another."[1]
Xi Jinping

michal812/Shutterstock.com

[1] China.org.cn, "Forging a new chapter in China-Africa friendship and cooperation," http://www.china.org.cn/world/2020-07/26/content_76313226.htm.

Relations between China[2] and African states are very often presented in a simplified way and do not reflect the complexity of reality. Furthermore, predominantly non-African and non-Chinese interpretations and narratives are used. Sources by the main protagonists are rather rarely found in the bibliographies of many texts. One can only speculate what the reasons are: They may range from simple ignorance to lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge to systematic racism, depending on the background of the author. However, no matter what the reasons for the respective narratives are and whether they can be empirically proven at all – if they are believed, they become politically powerful and have an influence on how the future is shaped. The following text is an attempt to look at Chinese involvement in Africa and will try to draw principally on African and Chinese sources. Due to the size of the continent and its diversity in every respect, only a very limited overview can be given, which will not be representative in all aspects, but attempts to summarize current developments.

The description of China's engagement will be roughly divided into the areas of military, economic, political and cultural-political engagement, even though these often overlap.

Military engagement

China's military engagement seems to be quite recent, although during the last decade several authors have mentioned that China is increasing its forces in Africa.[3] An important military base for China is Djibouti, which was set up in 2017[4], with a ten-year lease arrangement at $ 20 million per year.[5] A spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented on this step as follows:

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[2] Whenever China is mentioned in the following text, it refers to the People's Republic of China and not to the Republic of China (Taiwan).

[3] See e.g. Sean J. Li, "Why China Tripled Its Military Presence in Africa," https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2014/12/why-china-tripled-its-military-presence-africa/100364/.

[4] You Yang and Li Jingyi, "Djibouti: Chinese military's first overseas support base," https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d7859544d34457a6333566d54/index.html.

[5] Mail & Guardian, "China's expanding military footprint in Africa," https://mg.co.za/article/2018-10-24-chinas-expanding-military-footprint-in-africa/.

> Setting up the support base in Djibouti was a joint decision of the two countries. It will better let China fulfil its responsibilities in the international community.[6]

The base houses approximately 400 Chinese soldiers.[7] China joined several other non-African countries that already use facilities in Djibouti. Almost more interesting than the fact that China is present is that there are apparently joint exercises of Chinese and Western forces in Djibouti. According to a spokesperson of the Chinese Djibouti Support Base, medical rescue drills take place with other nations:

> We have held joint medical rescue drills with foreign troops stationed in Djibouti and the 465 Formation of the European Union. We have also commanded our escort helicopter to take off and land at the base. All of these have improved our logistic support capability.[8]

According to the US Department of Defense, China considered to set up military logistics facilities in Kenya, Tanzania, Angola and the Seychelles as well.[9]

Besides the above-mentioned engagement, China's participation in UN-led peace keeping operations has grown since 1989, when the country joined the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. In 2019, China already contributed more than 15% or around seven billion US-Dollars of the global peacekeeping budget. Half of the missions and two thirds of the budget are located in/allocated to Africa. China's contribution in military and police personnel amounts to more than that of the other four

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6 Yang, Jingyi, "Djibouti: Chinese military's first overseas support base."

7 Steven Li, "China's Military Seeks to Establish Base on African Coast: Warning from US General," https://www.visiontimes.com/2021/05/13/china-military-base-africa.html.

8 Yang, Jingyi, "Djibouti: Chinese military's first overseas support base."

9 Annual Report to Congress from the United States Department of Defense. Department Of Defense, "Military And Security Developments Involving The People's Republic Of China," 2020, https://china.usc.edu/department-defense-military-and-security-developments-involving-peoples-republic-china-2020.

permanent members of the UN Security Council and since 1989, over 40,000 Chinese peacekeepers have served in 24 missions.[10]

Apart from permanent presence and participation in international peace missions, China's strategy is shifting to foster military ties as well. While the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is mainly seen in economic terms, securing the BRI calls out for military backup. For this reason, the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum was held in 2019 for the first time in order to deepen the military and security cooperation approved by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018[11], where "China pledged to set up a peace and security fund, provide free military aid to the African Union and extend some 50 security assistance programs."[12]

Economic engagement

Far too often, economic engagement in Africa is seen from a Eurocentric and colonial perspective. The focus is on raw materials and unhindered access to them, as well as fear of migration and terror. It is this perspective that shapes the thinking about China's economic engagement.[13] It goes without saying that China joined the international competition for commodities when it became a major producer of everyday products like mobile phones, computers, and the like. But China sees African countries as a market for exactly these products and itself as an "important market for African exports"[14]. The next wave of engagement will be interlocking trade, digital money, and communications. Chinese companies invested a lot in

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10 Steven C Y Kuo, "China's approach to peace in Africa is different. How and why," https://theconversation.com/chinas-approach-to-peace-in-africa-is-different-how-and-why-129467.

11 Mail & Guardian, "China's expanding military footprint in Africa."

12 Han Bin, "China-Africa military officials step up cooperation at forum," https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-07-15/China-strengthens-security-ties-with-African-nations-IlGBKBQere/index.html.

13 See e.g. "China's metals import hunger shifts towards raw materials," https://www.mining.com/web/chinas-metals-import-hunger-shifts-towards-raw-materials-andy-home/.

14 China.org.cn, "Forging a new chapter in China-Africa friendship and cooperation."

understanding the market and researching the needs of the prospective customers, "such as long-life batteries for basic phones for rural areas."[15]

By 2023, China will complete a submarine cable around Africa, which "has the equivalent of all the current cables connecting the continent combined" and telecom companies and internet service providers are very active as well. Of course, with the hardware come software and apps, which can even allow secure transactions in Chinese cryptocurrencies.[16] With the arrival of other international actors, a battleground for digital dominance seems to have already opened.

Not everything is going as well as China wants it to; there are several drawbacks. In mid-May 2021, the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, mentioned several times that he wants to renegotiate the country's mining contracts, including those with China. Noting that the DRC is "the world capital of strategic minerals", the country is a major exporter of copper, uranium and cobalt, a new self-confidence seems to emerge. While Tshisekedi's predecessor Joseph Kabila was said to be more China-friendly, Tshisekedi is leaning more to the West, especially the United States of America.[17]

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[15] the africa report, "China-Africa: The growing battlefield for digital dominance," https://www.theafricareport.com/65139/china-africa-the-growing-battlefield-for-digital-dominance/.

[16] Ibid.

[17] The citizen, "DR Congo's president says he will renegotiate mining contracts," https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/africa/dr-congo-s-president-says-he-will-renegotiate-mining-contracts-3401160.

Major railway projects built by China in Africa

https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/29278322

China's economic assistance to African countries dates back to the times of their independence. In the first half of the 1970s, for example, the Chinese government helped to build the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, which links the seaport of Dar es Salaam with Kapiri Mposhi in Central Zambia. China not only has provided an interest-free loan but also shipped about one million

tons of equipment and materials, making it one of the largest projects China has ever undertaken in its overseas aid program.[18]

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) forms the core of China's economic engagement from a Chinese or Sinocentric perspective. Despite the fact that the BRI seems to develop into the umbrella or main narrative of Chinese policy thinking, most of the projects with African countries, even those that involve more than one are negotiated on a bilateral basis: "However, BRI projects that have a clear regional nature have so far been negotiated at the national level."[19]

Although the economic engagement of China in Africa is widely seen positively by African political elites, it comes with a downside. The US State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report 2020 mentions several cases of human trafficking from China to African countries. Not only cases of forced labour are found, but "PRC national traffickers operating abroad also subject local populations to sex trafficking in several countries in Africa." While African women tricked to travel to China are forced into commercial sex or sold to Chinese men for marriage, Chinese women are coerced into commercial sex in Chinese-owned bars and restaurants.[20]

Another negative impact felt by many African counties is the trade in endangered species or parts of them. The demand from China and other Asian countries has a deep impact on poaching all over the continent. Especially the demand for rhino horns, elephant tusks, and pangolins used in traditional medicine brings some of the species to the edge of extinction. While it is supposed that illegal international trade networks account for most of the trade, officials are sometimes involved as well, most probably tempted by the high profits.[21] The broader picture shows that wildlife trade

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[18] China.org.cn, "Priceless Friendship ChinAfrica," http://www.chinafrica.cn/Homepage/201910/t20191025_800182802.html.

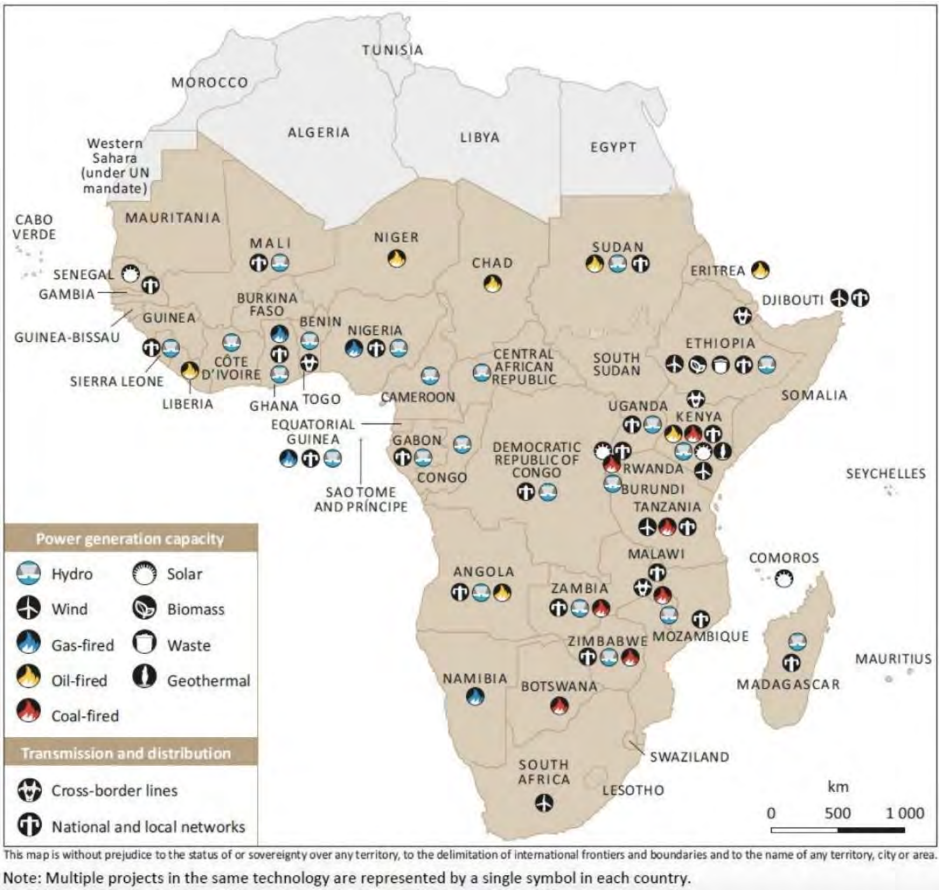
[19] Linda Calabrese, "Making the Belt and Road Initiative work for Africa," https://odi.org/en/insights/making-the-belt-and-road-initiative-work-for-africa/.

[20] Office to monitor and combat trafficking in persons, "2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: China," https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/china/.

[21] See e.g. Oscar Nkala, "Zambian poaching crisis fuelled by Chinese military," https://africageographic.com/stories/zambian-poaching-crisis-fuelled-by-chinese-military/.

in general became a highly profitable business for Chinese traders, illegal but legal as well.[22]

Chinese energy presence in Africa



This map is without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

Note: Multiple projects in the same technology are represented by a single symbol in each country.

https://medium.com/@timothydissegna/africa-looks-to-china-and-beyond-for-its-energydevelopment-829b9a1aa331, Credits: Mundo y Entorno Internacional/Facebook

[22] Africa Geographic, "Wildlife trade between South Africa and China exposed – legal and illegal," https://africageographic.com/stories/wildlife-trade-between-south-africa-and-china-legal-and-illegal/.

Political engagement

China's Africa ties in modern history date back to the times of the conference of Bandung in 1955, when Asian and almost all African countries were in search for freedom from their colonial masters. China and Chinese authors still emphasize the importance of that conference as the beginning of cooperation and friendship.[23] While this narrative is obviously still powerful today, the policy changed around the new millennium, when China entered the stage as a global player, in self- and alien perception. Before that, China concentrated its efforts on states in Africa that had severe political issues with the rest of the world like Sudan or Zimbabwe. But since the first China-Africa summit in 2000 China's strategy has changed dramatically and up to date 80% of African countries signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to become part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Political engagement belongs to and can hardly be separated from the other fields of engagement. China was one of the first global actors who engaged with the whole continent by organizing Africa summits. The first China-Africa summit, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), took place in 2000 and has since then become an important, if not **THE** pillar of the Chinese Africa policy.[24] FOCAC became an important conference where Chinese and African leaders can share their ideas. While maintaining its original goal to cooperate in infrastructure development and agriculture, the cooperation became more pragmatic over the years. Constantly, new fields of cooperation are added:

> For example, in political cooperation, in addition to high-level exchanges, political parties, legislatures, local governments, and exchanges of experience in state governance are gradually increased. Increased maritime economic cooperation, food safety cooperation, traditional Chinese medicine, African traditional medical cooperation, and China-Africa cultural industry cooperation.[25]

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[23] See e.g. Liu Haifang, "Bring back the 'Bandung Spirit' in China-Africa relationship," https://pandapawdragonclaw.blog/2020/05/02/bring-back-the-bandung-spirit-in-china-africa-relationship/.

[24] Hanane Thamik, "FOCAC: 20 years of shared destiny and success," https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/11/06/focac-20-years-of-shared-destiny-and-success/.

[25] Ibid.

The Covid-19 pandemic is also used as a political tool. The Chinese perspective reads as follows:

> Facing challenges brought by the sudden Covid-19 outbreak, China and Africa have offered mutual support, fought shoulder to shoulder with each other, jointly held the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against Covid-19, setting a new benchmark in the international cooperation against Covid-19.[26]

In African countries with long-established ties to China, the Sinovac vaccine was already used at an early stage. At the time of writing this article, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia, Egypt and Tunisia[27] are the beneficiaries. It has to be mentioned as well, however, that the problem for many African countries is not only the lack of vaccine. Storage, distribution and the lack of will of people to be vaccinated create challenges as well. Several African countries had to dispose of vaccines because of these reasons.[28]

Cultural policy engagement

The Chinese approach not only seems to involve the construction of buildings and the mostly one-way exchange of students. China eyes on young African leaders as well and invites Africans for education and training to China[29] and pushes for exchange programs between educational institutions for many years.[30]

The cultural exchange between China and African countries started as early as the 1950s to benefit both sides. The knowledge of each other still seems to be quite limited, although it improved over the years. One way of promoting China and Chinese culture in Africa are the Confucius Institutes,

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[26] China.org.cn, "Forging a new chapter in China-Africa friendship and cooperation."

[27] Bloomberg News. "China Sinovac Shot Seen Highly Effective in Real World Study," https://www.bloomberg.com/europe.

[28] See e.g. Michael Oduor, "South Sudan joins Malawi in destroying thousands of expired Covid jabs," https://www.africanews.com/2021/04/19/south-sudan-joins-malawi-in-destroying-thousands-of-expired-covid-jabs/.

[29] Esther Nakkazi, "China ramps up support for African higher education," https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180907083412817.

[30] Xin-lin Mei, "Road of China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange with its own characteristics, US-China Education Review," March 2007, Volume 4, No. 3 (Serial No. 28), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497387.pdf.

which were set up in almost all African countries.[31] Maurice Gountin argues that during the last two decades the "Chinese have become more concerned about the value of traditional culture and its promotion, rather than simply stressing political ideology."[32]

During the last years programs started in many African countries to teach Mandarin. One of the latest states to make it part of its Competency Based Curriculum was Kenya in 2020. It will be taught alongside French, Arabic and German on a voluntary basis. The African arguments center around the following: Mandarin can no longer be ignored since it is one of the most-spoken languages on earth and it is necessary to have Mandarin-speaking citizens in order to attract a growing number of Chinese-speaking tourists.[33]

China is eyeing local media in order to promote itself. According to Eric Claude Olander, "Chinese propaganda and highly partisan pro-Chinese columns are now being published with more regularity on the website of Kenya's state-run broadcaster KBC."[34] These articles frame stories more or less with the language of Chinese official propaganda.[35]

In 2016, the African research institution Afrobarometer conducted a study on how the engagement of African governments with China is perceived. 63% per cent of the citizens of 36 countries had a positive attitude towards it. Especially investment, infrastructure and development projects were judged favourably, while the quality of Chinese products was seen critically.[36] Unfortunately, there are no later data from Afrobarometer available.

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31 Maurice Gountin, "China's cultural interest in Sino-African cultural exchanges," https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/china's-cultural-interest-sino-african-cultural-exchanges.

32 Ibid.

33 Mu Xuequan, "Kenya plans to introduce Mandarin in schools in 2020," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2019-01/07/c_137726758.htm.

34 Eric Claude Olander, "Kenya's State-Run Broadcaster Looks More and More Like an Outlet of Chinese Propaganda," https://chinaafricaproject.com/2021/05/11/kenyas-state-run-broadcaster-looks-more-and-more-like-an-outlet-for-chinese-propaganda/.

35 Ibid.

36 Afrobarometer, "Here's what Africans think about China's influence in their countries," https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/heres-what-africans-think-about-chinas-influence-their-countries.

Conclusions

Although the Chinese engagement in African countries started already at the time of their independence, the relationships became more dynamic during the last two decades. China is an important partner for African countries and pursues its interests as every external actor does. Depending on the security-political climate, it is sometimes easier and sometimes less easy to gain influence and access to the markets and commodities.

While the EU and the USA seem to have reduced their interest in Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic, at least in public perception, China is using the pandemic to continue to pursue its political goals. A form of "vaccination diplomacy" is used to attempt to bind states more closely to China. The extent to which this strategy will work largely depends on how China deals with countries that are struggling with financial problems due to the pandemic.

The interest of European countries and others to take back production formerly outsourced to China is changing the whole setup for the continent. African countries are set to become a new geopolitical playground. Especially those, which have abundant resources needed for the production of batteries, computer screens and the like.

In the military field, it seems to be quite similar. When the USA and European countries scaled back their African operation, China stepped in, following a strategy already observed in former times in Zimbabwe and Sudan, where China took over when the others left. Although China's role grew significantly over the last ten to fifteen years, the military sector is still far behind the economic one.[37] Therefore, in the near future Chinese efforts are likely to increase.

Will loans be rescheduled, debt payments suspended to help languishing states or will China insist on agreements to be fulfilled? In the second case, the pendulum could swing to China's disadvantage, namely if other lenders step in.[38]

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[37] Bin, "China-Africa military officials step up cooperation at forum."

[38] A very recent example is the engagement of France for Sudan. According to *Deutsche Welle* on May 17, 2021, "France offered crisis-stricken Sudan a bridging loan worth $1.5 billion (€1.25 billion) on Monday to help pay its arrears to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while Germany is also keen to participate in Sudan's debt relief."

In joining other nations in Djibouti, China underlines the importance of the Bab al Mandeb, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal for international trade. Since the container ship "Ever Given" blocked the shipping traffic for several days, it became visible on the one hand how vulnerable this sea area is and how essential it is for a smoothly running world economy on the other, for China as well as for Europe.

If the information concerning China's possible military bases is true, China's focus is clearly on the Indian Ocean. Except Angola, where China has strong economic interests, all other countries in question are part of the Indian Ocean rim or islands. While there are not many African concerns raised about the Chinese military presence, the USA is worried about Chinese bases on the Atlantic coast, be it a base in Angola or the Gulf of Guinea.[39]

But China is not just a benevolent actor trying to develop other countries. As a geopolitical actor, it merely pursues its interests with a different political approach that is perceived more positively in the countries concerned. The outcome might tell other stories. Especially the externalization of environmental damage, the trade in wildlife and especially in endangered species are the downside of the cooperations.

[39] Li, "China's Military Seeks to Establish Base on African Coast."

China's Footprint in Afghanistan after the Taliban Takeover

Markus Gauster

GR.Stocks/Shutterstock.com

Introduction

With its unique position as a land-locked country and traditional buffer zone between various empires, Afghanistan represents a geopolitical playground for great powers, amongst others, the People's Republic of China (PRC).[1] The China's relations with neighbouring Afghanistan started to increase from a low level in 1997, when China established official diplomatic relations with the Taliban who ruled the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* at that time and managed to re-establish it in 2021. When the US-operation *Enduring Freedom* ousted the Taliban in 2001, China increased its trade relations with the

[1] In this article, the abbreviation PRC refers to China.

Afghan government under the presidency of Hamid Karzai (2001-2014), focused on good neighbourly relations and provided humanitarian assistance. Maintaining security in Afghanistan was not the main focus for China at this stage of the US-intervention as this was the responsibility of the US-led military coalition.[2] In addition, China had no interest to play a subordinated role under the dominance of western stakeholders.[3]

In 2021, US-troops and their European and other allies withdrew from Afghanistan after 20 years of military intervention and crisis management efforts. This gives China the unique opportunity to expand its own bilateral approach with its neighbour, but it also comes with big challenges. In particular, China has to deal with an Afghanistan that is, again, dominated by the Taliban, driven by a civil war economy, traditional clan and tribe structures, growing ungoverned spaces under the rule of warlords and militias, high instability, and lacking human security. The Taliban leadership will increase uncertainty about the future of Afghanistan, but China appears to be well prepared in this matter.[4]

With US-China rivalry growing and US engagement in Afghanistan diminishing, China may gradually complement the US role in Afghanistan rather than replace it.[5] China's increasing collaboration with stakeholders in Afghanistan (in particular with the Taliban) is driven by gaining access to the country and its vast resources,[6] but most importantly, by massive concerns

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2 Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan," *Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK)*, National Defence Academy, Vienna, March 16, 2021.

3 Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives," *A Report of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program* (March 2012), 2, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf.

4 Yaron Steinbuch, "China ready to deepen 'friendly and cooperative' Afghanistan relations," New York Post, August 16, 2021, https://nypost.com/2021/08/16/china-ready-to-deepen-relationship-with-afghanistan/.

5 "China's Role in Post-Conflict Afghanistan. Interview with Janan Mosazai," *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, April 24, 2019, https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-role-in-post-conflict-afghanistan/.

6 Tiffany P. Ng, *China's Role in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan* (Washington DC, Carnegie Policy Outlook, 2010), 2, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/china_role_afghanistan.pdf.

of a growing security vacuum.[7] Hence, the collapse of the Ghani-Administration turned into reality as a consequence of the US military withdrawal, in combination with the paralysation and surrender of the Afghan National Army, amongst many other factors.

In this context, it is important to shed some light on how China is interfering in Afghanistan and what the first implications of the Taliban takeover are. What are the diplomatic, economic, security-political and socio-cultural instruments it applies? What are China's narratives and persuasion factors to implement its strategy? How are US-China relations and policies elaborating on Afghan soil and what are the implications of China's presence for Afghanistan's security architecture and for the whole region with the Taliban in power? Increasing Chinese engagement in combination with the 2021 regime change in Afghanistan will also leave a substantial impact on the EU and its role as a big donor for Afghanistan, referring to its room for manoeuvre in diplomacy, humanitarian crisis response, development assistance, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Afghanistan after the US-military withdrawal.

https://es.sott.net/article/57696-Para-que-quiere-China-una-base-militar-en-Afganistan

[7] Charu Sudan Kasturi, "Butterfly effect: Is China ready to step up in Afghanistan?," *Ozy*, April 23, 2021, https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/butterfly-effect-is-china-ready-to-step-up-in-afghanistan/429437/.

Narratives of China with regard to Afghanistan

Narrative 1: Securing China's periphery

China has a strong focus to maintain a safe and secure periphery. China's comprehensive approach includes the establishment of regional security arrangements, providing technical assistance and development cooperation in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan as well as seizing investment opportunities there. China's security concerns even go so far as to promote the narrative that "China will remain insecure as long as its periphery is not finally integrated into the Chinese homeland".[8] To this end, China makes use of a substantial diplomatic, economic and intelligence representation in its periphery and aims to include its neighbours in regional security- and economy-related organisations and agreements. Afghanistan is China's test case for promoting this narrative.

Narrative 2: Strengthening cooperation on counterterrorism and de-radicalisation

China aims to strengthen cooperation with its neighbours by promoting various initiatives and multilateral formats. By using its image as a non-interventionist country and making use of its status of "relative neutrality",[9] China is able to establish regional political, economic and security organisations with the *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (SCO) as best example, but also alternative platforms for dialogue with neighbouring countries. In the framework of the SCO, Afghanistan has been holding an observer status since June 2012. According to SCO estimates, production of narcotics reaches up to 65% of the revenues made by militias and warlords in the region.[10] In this context, the SCO's main goal is to counter cross-border drug trafficking.

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8 Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

9 Yun Sun, "China's strategic assessment of Afghanistan," *War on the Rocks*, April 8, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/chinas-strategic-assessment-of-afghanistan/.

10 "SCO Secretariat holds roundtable discussion on Afghanistan," *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Secretariat*, January 9, 2019, http://eng.sectsco.org/news/20200109/621306.html.

Narrative 3: Regional economic integration

China considers Afghanistan not as a "buffer zone" but as a strategic transit and trade hub for continental economic corridors. In the framework of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), where Afghanistan is already integrated through a Memorandum of Understanding with China in 2016,[11] China promotes the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan and of the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor to Iran.[12] As a consequence, Afghanistan is in a strategic position for China to play a crucial role in regional economic integration.

Political relations China – Afghanistan

There is a long history of friendly relations between Afghanistan and China that started during the Han Dynasty more than 2,000 years ago.[13] The ancient Silk Road and trade played a substantial role for their relations. China never invaded Afghanistan militarily, compared to other big powers that were active in the "Great Game" like Great Britain, the former Soviet Union and, most recently, the USA. Since 2001, China has been supporting war-torn Afghanistan with development assistance, humanitarian aid and direct investments.[14] Amongst others, this also includes the donation of Covid-19 vaccines.[15] On the other hand, Afghan exports to China remain low compared to exports to the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan but have gradually been increasing since 2018.[16]

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11 Mariam Safi and Bismellah Alizada, *Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative – Review, Analysis and Prospects* (Kabul, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2018), Introduction, X, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kabul/15587.pdf.

12 Doris Vogl in the Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

13 Serafettin Yilmaz 姚仕帆, *Afghanistan: China's New Frontier?* (e-IR, Shandong University, 2012), Abstract, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287196250_Afghanistan_China's_New_Frontier.

14 Noor Rahman Tahriri, *Afghanistan and China Trade Relationship* (Munich, MPRA Paper no. 82098, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2017), 2-3, https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/82098/MPRA Paper No. 82098.

15 "China-donated COVID-19 vaccines handed over to Afghanistan," *China.org.cn*, June 13, 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2021-06/13/content_77565513.htm.

16 Hujjatullah Zia, "A surge in China-Afghan trade," *China Daily*, February 14, 2019, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201902/14/WS5c65346ba3106c65c34e9606.html.

The relations between the two countries are of strategic relevance for both. Afghanistan has been dependent on foreign aid and welcomes any support from China. This has not changed after the Taliban takeover, as the new regime needs to feed the population to avoid insurgency. On the other hand, China shares a 70 km long border with Afghanistan with direct security implications in case of a regime change, collapse or unlimited civil war in Afghanistan. China is one of the biggest donors to Afghanistan, together with the USA, EU and several other countries. The Hamid Karzai- and Ashraf Ghani-Administrations as well as the Taliban strengthened diplomatic ties with China, e.g., with several official visits to Beijing. In terms of foreign aid, Afghanistan has managed to diversify its portfolio of donors from the East and the West since 2001.

The strategic importance of Afghanistan for China has several dimensions. On the political level, China's role in the intra-Afghan peace process has been growing constantly since 2016 and reflects the security concerns.[17] China had organised a series of conferences that were conducted complementary to the US-efforts for peace talks. Concerning the ongoing peace process, there is a linkage to China's non-interference policy as China has always advocated that this process should be "Afghan-owned and Afghan-led". Contrary to that, China has criticised the US withdrawal as "abrupt and irresponsible", as it has led to more violence in Afghanistan,[18] before the Taliban finally assumed power in August 2021.

However, not all Afghan stakeholders are satisfied with Chinese advances to provide an additional platform for peace talks. For example, former president Hamid Karzai, still a very influential stakeholder in Afghanistan's politics, skipped his participation in an intra-Afghan dialogue series organised by China in 2019.[19] Probably the fact that delegations of the Taliban had also been invited to Beijing on a regular basis since 2017 kept

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17 Sohrab Azad, "China's stake in the Afghan Peace Process," *The Diplomat*, September 22, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/chinas-stake-in-the-afghan-peace-process/.

18 "China criticises US over decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan," *South Asia Monitor*, May 13, 2021, https://www.southasiamonitor.org/afghanistan/china-criticises-us-over-decision-withdraw-troops-afghanistan.

19 Ahmad Shah Erfanyar, "Karzai to skip intra-Afghan dialogue in Beijing," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, November 25, 2019, https://pajhwok.com/2019/11/25/karzai-skip-intra-afghan-dialogue-beijing/.

him from joining Chinese peace efforts. However, Beijing tried to move forward to support the peace process shortly before the Taliban took over. Together with Afghanistan and Pakistan, China presented an 8-point consensus on promoting Afghanistan's peace process.[20]

In fact, China is doing everything in its portfolio to prevent a spillover of terrorism from Central Asia and Afghanistan onto its soil. This includes maintaining official diplomatic relations with the Taliban before and after their takeover to be able to influence them to a certain extent. In parallel to its existing relations with the official government of Afghanistan, Chinese political and diplomatic ties with the Taliban are going back as far as 1996, when the Taliban ruled more than two thirds of the country. Based on earlier diplomatic relations, China was stepping up its ties with the Taliban again around 2015, anticipating the consequences of a US withdrawal and recognising the increasing power of the Taliban movement. China even goes as far as offering the Taliban a road network in exchange for peace.[21]

With its "Taliban diplomacy", China already tried to manage the terrorist threat in Afghanistan by legitimising and recognising the Taliban as a future political power – years before they actually ousted the Ghani government in 2021. To put it in context, according to Thomas Ruttig, China perceives the *Balochistan Liberation Army* (a terrorist organisation operating in Pakistan and beyond) as a bigger threat to China's interests than the Taliban in Afghanistan.[22] This can be underlined by the attack on the Serena Hotel in April 2021 in Quetta / Pakistan, where the Chinese Ambassador was lodging at that time.[23] It is obvious that China intends to profit from good relations

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[20] "China, Afghanistan, Pakistan reach 8-point consensus on promoting Afghanistan's peace process," *CGTN*, June 4, 2021, https://newsaf.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-04/China-Afghanistan-Pakistan-reach-8-point-consensus-10NWx1Q50Iw/index.html.

[21] Lynne O'Donnel, "China offers Taliban road network in exchange for peace," *Financial Times*, September 8, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/69110b85-bce9-45cb-a2f4-eadcd3edc6e3.

[22] Thomas Ruttig, "Climbing on China's Priority List: Views on Afghanistan from Beijing," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 10, 2018, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/regional-relations/climbing-on-chinas-priority-list-views-on-afghanistan-from-beijing/.

[23] Reuters, "Car Bombing At Hotel In Southwest Pakistan Kills 4, Wounds 11," *Tolonews*, April 22, 2021, https://tolonews.com/world-171619.

with the Taliban for future economic projects in Afghanistan in the context of its Belt and Road Initiative.[24]

Political relations in context: comparing US and Chinese approaches on Afghanistan

China's footprint in Afghanistan cannot be analysed as isolated from the engagement of the United States in this protracted conflict zone. China and the USA have various policies and instruments to deal with Afghanistan, but not necessarily diverging perceptions in all domains. Both the USA and China do not list the Taliban as a terrorist organisation, as both countries intend to maintain, at least, constructive relations with them. On the operational level, both countries had collaborated to a certain extent in the fields of logistics, police training and mine awareness training during the US military presence in Afghanistan.[25] Both do not want Afghanistan to be a safe haven for transnational terrorists and are taking action against terrorist financing (by the Taliban, Al Qaida and other militant groups and extremists) in the whole region. To this end, both are members of the *Financial Action Task Force* (FATF).[26] In addition, China and the USA are, together with Russia and Pakistan, members of the *Extended Troika* to facilitate peace talks, political settlement and inclusive governance in Afghanistan. This body may be of relevance also after the Taliban takeover. However, both China and the USA were explicitly against a restoration of an *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* by the Taliban[27] as they prefer a less rigid political system in

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[24] "China signals veto in standoff over UN Afghanistan mission," *Aljazeera News*, September 17, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/17/china-signals-veto-in-standoff-over-un-afghanistan-mission

[25] Pan Guang, "USA und Taliban unterzeichneten ein Friedensabkommen, aber die Menschen um ihn herum riechen keinen Frieden" (translation from Mandarin), *Observer Network*, March 5, 2020, https://www.guancha.cn/PanGuang/2020_03_05_539951.shtml. Additional: Ng, *China's Role in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan*, 3.

[26] Adam Weinstein, "What Will It Take for Pakistan to Pressure the Taliban Into a Cease-Fire?," *Lawfare Blog*, February 12, 2021, https://www.lawfareblog.com/what-will-it-take-pakistan-pressure-taliban-cease-fire. Additional: *Financial Action Task Force* (FATF) on https://www.fatf-gafi.org/about/.

[27] SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Quarterly Report No. 51, April 30, 2021), 94, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-04-30qr.pdf.

Afghanistan. Probably both the USA and China may have to accept the political reality of a Taliban-Emirate under certain conditions.

In fact, China and the USA have substantial overlapping factors in their policies and strategies for Afghanistan. Despite their growing rivalry, it appears that China-US interaction in the context of Afghanistan is working out quite well on the operational level. The lowest common denominator of their interests is that they "want the security threat contained" in Afghanistan.[28] Barnett Rubin, US-expert on Afghanistan, even states that, although China has been increasingly present in Afghanistan "to test the limits of US-China collaboration, China wants to help the USA because they share a common interest in a stable Afghanistan."[29]

Both countries are collaborating with Afghanistan on the basis of political agreements. China signed a "Cooperation Pact" with Afghanistan in 2012. China has agreed to support Afghanistan with 24 million USD in development assistance, border security and disease control assets. In return, Afghanistan "reaffirmed China's sovereignty over the Xinjiang region".[30] Epidemics and border security are clearly transnational issues, especially in times of Covid-19, and it is noteworthy that China was well aware of the dangers of epidemics long before the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

The USA and Afghanistan fixed their special relations in the *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan and the United States of America*. This agreement was signed in 2012, the same year when China signed its cooperation pact with Afghanistan.[31] The US-Afghan agreement should serve as a basis for future cooperation but ended obviously in August 2021 after the US-withdrawal. Therefore, Afghanistan had the special status of a "Major non-NATO Ally" together with (only) 17 other non-NATO nations worldwide between 2012 and 2021.

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[28] Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan*, Foreword, V.

[29] Mat Nashed, "The road to peace in Afghanistan passes to China," *Ozy*, September 9, 2019, https://www.ozy.com/the-new-and-the-next/the-road-to-peace-in-afghanistan-passes-through-china/95969/.

[30] "Bejing, Kabul sign cooperation pact," *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, June 8, 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/china-afghanistan-cooperation-pact/24607671.html.

[31] *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan and USA*, May 2012, https://photos.state.gov/libraries/afghanistan/231771/PDFs/2012-05-01-scan-of-spa-english.pdf.

In 2019, Afghanistan received more than one quarter of US total military assistance (this was more than the US support for Israel) and was supported with 4.9 billion USD, the highest amount of US foreign aid (civil and military) for a country worldwide.[32] From 2002-2017, China has been providing 400 million USD in financial aid for Afghanistan,[33] a very small amount compared to the USA. China perceives its support not as a donation, but as a long-term, strategic investment for a security cooperation with any regime in Afghanistan. In this context, it appears that China had, to a certain extent, anticipated the sooner-or-later takeover of the Taliban.

Security relations China – Afghanistan

Security in Afghanistan is of utmost relevance for China as the violent conflict has negative consequences for the whole region. Until 2020, China provided approx. 70 million USD of military aid.[34] Another aspect is to limit the huge opium influx from Afghanistan into China.[35] Out of these massive security concerns, China has been following the situation in Afghanistan and the actions of the present stakeholders (including the USA) very closely at least since 2001, in order to develop its own approach to contain the armed conflict in Afghanistan.

China increased its security relations with Afghanistan around 2017/2018, after several visits of the Afghan President Ghani in China. At that time, China was starting to fund a "training camp" for the Afghan National Army in the Wakhan Corridor on Afghan soil, close to the Chinese border. In this context, China is using its narrative of "military cooperation" to support Afghan security structures and deploy Chinese soldiers but would never call

[32] Kaia Hubbard, "3 Charts that illustrate where U.S. foreign aid goes," *U.S. News*, May 24, 2021, https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-05-24/afghanistan-israel-largest-recipients-of-us-foreign-aid.

[33] Sun, "China's strategic assessment of Afghanistan."

[34] Ibid.

[35] Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, *China's Evolving Stance on Afghanistan: Towards More Robust Diplomacy with "Chinese Characteristics"* (Warsaw, Strategic File No. 22 (58), Oct. 2014), 3, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184324/PISM%20Strategic%20File%20no%2022%20(58).pdf.

it a "military base". It is reported that there are several hundreds of Chinese soldiers and engineers in the Wakhan Corridor to help construct a camp, but information on this project is very rare.[36] In any case, it shows that China is highly active in Afghanistan and has its boots on the ground.

Chinese Military Cooperation in Afghanistan

https://www.inkstonenews.com/china/china-fund-construction-anti-terrorist-training-camp-afghanistan/article/2161869 (Illustration: Cena Lau)

China's strong commitment to counterterrorism and de-radicalisation is focusing on the homeland (in particular on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) as well as on security in its periphery. The worst-case scenario for China would be a possible transnational unification of violent extremists and militant Islamist groups alongside its western and southern borders.[37] To pre-empt this, China is very active in its periphery, in particular with regard to Afghanistan, where, for example, a re-unification of *Al-Qaida* and the *Islamic State in Khorasan Province* (ISKP) terrorist organisations is

[36] Kinling Lo, "Why is China funding a military outpost in Afghanistan?," *Inkstonenews*, August 29, 2018, https://www.inkstonenews.com/china/china-fund-construction-anti-terrorist-training-camp-afghanistan/article/2161869.

[37] Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

possible.[38] In this context, China has been active in establishing the *Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (RATS SCO), a permanent platform of the SCO in which China promotes regional cooperation for counterterrorism, against separatism as well as extremism. Afghanistan is included in the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure RATS as part of a greater Chinese de-radicalisation-strategy. In this context, China aims to identify adversaries in its periphery, based on an increased use of intelligence, with special regard to Afghanistan.[39]

China is also the driving force behind the *Afghanistan-Pakistan-China Trilateral Dialogue* that was established in 2017 to strengthen collaboration efforts on counterterrorism. China perceives Afghanistan as a substantial threat since hundreds of Uyghur militants appear to be active in Northern Afghanistan, amongst many other militant groups and insurgents.[40] The joint statement of the *Trilateral Dialogue* meeting on July 7, 2020 speaks a clear language with regard to the Xinjiang-Uyghur question,[41] as all sides (not only China, but also Pakistan and Afghanistan) agreed "to combat the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM; the Chinese label for Uyghur militant Islamists), and all other terrorist forces and networks posing threats to our common security".[42] According to this agreement, China is enabled to prosecute Uyghur militants operating in Afghanistan, in particular by making use of its intelligence units.[43] The presence of Chinese intelligence in Afghanistan has manifested in the so-called "Kabul spy case" (December 2020), when several Chinese spies were arrested in Kabul.[44] It appears that China is not only

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38 Ruttig, "Climbing on China's Priority List."

39 Lynne O'Donnell, "Afghanistan wanted Chinese Mining Investment. It got a Chinese Spy Ring Instead," *Foreign Policy*, January 27, 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/27/afghanistan-china-spy-ring-mcc-mining-negotiations-mineral-wealth/.

40 Chienyu Shih, "The Uyghur factor: China perceives Afghanistan as a threat," *Sunday Guardian Live*, January 16, 2021, https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/uyghur-factor-china-perceives-afghanistan-threat.

41 Doris Vogl in the Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

42 "Joint Press Release of the 3rd Round China - Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Afghanistan*, July 7, 2020, https://www.mfa.gov.af/press-releases/1901-joint-press-release-of-the-3rd-round-china-afghanistan-pakistan-trilateral-vice-foreign-ministers-strategic-dialogue.htm.

43 Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

44 O'Donnell, "Afghanistan wanted Chinese Mining Investment."

collaborating with the Taliban before and after gaining power, but also making use of the Haqqani-Network, a terrorist organisation linked to the Taliban, to hunt down Uyghurs in Afghanistan.[45]

China is showing an increasing presence in international UN peacekeeping and political missions. In Afghanistan, the NATO-led *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF; 2002-2014) or *Resolute Support Mission* (RSM; 2015-2021) were, of course, no option for Beijing. However, China made use of its leverage as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSR) and advocated its *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) infrastructure project into the mandate of the UN political mission UNAMA, active in Afghanistan since 2002.[46] This case shows that China is using its UNSR position to add a different dimension to BRI by including it in UN Resolutions for their own purpose and not in purpose for the mission, as the USA had criticised.[47] In addition, China has contributed with military officers to UNAMA since 2017 to be able to follow and shape UNAMA's approach in Afghanistan more intensively. It is not unrealistic that China may send military peacekeepers to Afghanistan to secure its border regions against security threats.[48]

Put into context, Afghanistan is strategically relevant, but Pakistan is still much more important for China in terms of security and economic cooperation, with the *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* (CPEC) as the strategic infrastructure project. The regime change in Afghanistan 2021 represents a big challenge for China. However, if Pakistan as a nuclear power would collapse, this would be a much higher risk for China and international security. On another note, "Pakistan does not want China to become directly involved in Afghanistan".[49] In fact, being active in Afghanistan is a very tricky political issue for China in order not to collide with the interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan and its strategic environment.

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45 Ibid.

46 "China signals veto in standoff over UN Afghanistan mission," *Aljazeera News*.

47 Ibid.

48 Ma Haiyun, "Could China send peacekeeping troops to Afghanistan?" *ThinkChina*, May 3, 2021, https://www.thinkchina.sg/could-china-send-peacekeeping-troops-afghanistan.

49 Ruttig, "Climbing on China's Priority List."

Economic relations China – Afghanistan

Before 1996, China's economic footprint in Afghanistan was relatively limited, as it had experienced war since 1979 (Soviet intervention, civil war). This has changed since the Taliban established power in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. At that time, China's demand for resources was growing as fast as its economic growth was speeding up. In 2020, China's official economic approach in Afghanistan is determined as follows:

> China will continue to support the integration of Afghanistan in regional cooperation. We welcome Afghanistan to take an active part in the development of China-proposed Silk Road Economic Belt and, with its geographical advantage and resource endowment, to become an active player in regional connectivity, energy transport and regional trade.[50]

With the aim to improve regional connectivity, ensure the transport of goods and maintain the stability of regional supply chains, China is promoting the reduction of regional import tariffs and trade barriers. To this end, the *China-Afghanistan-Central Asian Countries* (CA-5) Meeting on Trade and Connectivity was held on December 9, 2020. Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Luo Zhaohui commented on the CA-5 Summit that economic cooperation is key:

> All parties should further step up cooperation in agriculture, energy, infrastructure, production capacity and other fields, and improve the level of industrialization. China is willing to leverage its strength in digital technology and scale and work with all parties to build a "digital Silk Road".[51]

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[50] "Promote China-Afghanistan Cooperation and Bring New Life to the Silk Road. Vice President Li Yuanchao of the People's Republic of China," *Embassy of the PRC in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, November 5, 2015, http://af.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxw/t1312041.htm.

[51] "Vice Foreign Ministers of China-Afghanistan-Central Asian Countries Hold a Virtual Meeting on Trade and Connectivity," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC*, December 9, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1839389.shtml.

Since 2014, China has been the largest foreign investor[52] and biggest trading partner[53] of Afghanistan. The biggest investment announcement so far was to win a joint bid of three Chinese companies worth up to 3.5 billion USD for the *Ainak Copper Mine*, a 28-km² area in Logar Province.[54] However, by strengthening its already existing diplomatic ties with the Taliban since 2016, China was de-legitimising the Afghan government under Ashraf Ghani that was still highly dependent on foreign aid and financial support. Then-President Ghani, well aware of the worsening situation in all aspects, tried to move China into action to fulfil the Ainak contract, start the exploitation of the Copper Mine and create jobs for the Afghan population, but growing insecurity and other issues made it impossible.

China won the mine contract already in 2008, but it has always hesitated to invest because of rising security concerns. Its negative experience with the Ainak Copper Mine was a turning point for China to focus more on security as this mine can only be exploited if the overall security situation is reliable. The Afghan government was expecting huge revenues and benefits from this project including social welfare and job creation. This has not manifested yet as the risks and uncertainties appear to be too high for China to invest. In addition, this strategic mine investment was also slowed down by corruption and other issues.[55]

On the other hand, China has more than enough time to wait until the political and/or security situation is in favour to start the exploitation process. This appears to be possible under the Taliban regime.

In addition, the substantial oil (est. 1.6 billion barrels) and gas (est. approx. 15 trillion cubic feet) reserves may also be of future interest for China. The transport of these commodities is relatively easy as China is opening up its

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52 Banco Santander, "Afghanistan: Foreign investment. FDI in Figures, as of May 2021," https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/establish-overseas/afghanistan/investing.

53 Safi and Alizada, *Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative*.

54 Monika Chansoria, "China is expanding its footprint in Afghanistan," *Sunday Guardian*, September 7, 2013, www.sunday-guardian.com/analysis/china-is-expanding-its-footprint-in-afghanistan.

55 O'Donnell, "Afghanistan wanted Chinese Mining Investment."

infrastructure via the Wakhan Corridor and is able to move goods directly from Afghanistan to China.[56]

Socio-cultural relations China – Afghanistan

The cultural relations between China and Afghanistan are relatively sparse, but there are several activities in this context. The Confucius Institute at Kabul University has been an important Chinese institution to promote culture and education exchange in Afghanistan since 2008. Up to 2013, the Confucius Institute had 174 Afghan students enrolled, and 50 of them studied in China with scholarships sponsored by the Chinese government.[57] Due to security concerns, the Confucius Institute in Kabul had to close for 18 months in October 2010 but reopened in 2012.[58]

China has also an interest in preserving cultural heritage in its periphery in order to develop good relations with its neighbours. On May 12, 2021, China signed separate cooperation agreements with Afghanistan and Pakistan to protect and restore cultural artefacts in the *China-Afghanistan and China-Pakistan Joint Statements on Cooperation in the Asian Initiative for Cultural Heritage Conservation* under the framework of the Asian Initiative for Cultural Heritage Conservation.[59]

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[56] Chansoria, "China is expanding its footprint."

[57] "The Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan and Confucius Institute of Kabul University jointly hold 'My Chinese Dream' Speech Competition," *Embassy of the PRC in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, October 21, 2013, http://af.china-embassy.org/eng/zagx/sbgx/t1095375.htm.

[58] "China reopens Confucius Institute in Afghanistan," *Zeenews*, April 8, 2013, https://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/china-reopens-confucius-institute-in-afghanistan_840544.html.

[59] "In Asia first, China inks bilateral cooperation agreements on heritage conservation with Afghanistan, Pakistan," *CGTN*, May 12, 2021, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-12/China-expands-action-to-safeguard-heritage-with-Afghanistan-Pakistan-10cr1JCYvBK/index.html.

Conclusion

In 2021, the stability of Central and South Asia is at stake[60], with rising insecurity in Afghanistan negatively impacting on the whole region.[61] There is one hegemon, China, with several failing states in its strategic environment. In this context, China is promoting the general narrative that "a safer Afghanistan implies a safer China".[62] China has the ability to make important contributions to Afghan stability[63] with a different approach compared to the USA, especially after the takeover of the Taliban in 2021. In this context, China's engagement in Afghanistan represents a strategic test-case to show its ability and capacity to achieve a secure and stable periphery. Therefore, China has switched from an economic- and assistance-driven approach (approx. between 2001 and 2011) to a more security-orientated approach (2011-2021). The main driver for change was the growing instability in Afghanistan and its potential negative impacts for China.

However, China is well aware that a purely military solution and/or counterterrorism alone are not the appropriate instruments to solve the Afghan conflict and prevent negative spillover, as British, Soviet and US-interventions in Afghanistan have shown. However, it appears that China's policy of non-interference has changed over time with Afghanistan as a vibrant example of rising Chinese engagement in several dimensions. In this context, China will follow an engagement strategy by supporting and appeasing any regime, including the Taliban, which is capable of managing Afghan soil on the basis of a low-intensity conflict that will not harm China's security interests. In the case of complete mismanagement of the new Taliban regime, or if the Taliban continue to harbour and support international terrorism on a large scale, China will most likely switch to a

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60 "Joint Statement of the Fourth China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue on Afghanistan's Peace and Reconciliation Process," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, June 3, 2021, https://www.mfa.gov.af/news/3076-joint-statement-of-the-fourth-china-afghanistan-pakistan-trilateral-foreign-ministers-dialogue-on-afghanistan-s-peace-and-reconciliation-process.html?fbclid=IwAR3o_2QzHh9ThVckZW8zsm0UQRIoQMDiZtHa9vjX9CZvwV39AuXIBjkQlyM.

61 Otmar Höll in the Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

62 Ali Baqeri in the Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

63 Ng, *China's Role in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan*, Summary.

more military-related containment strategy if vital security interests are at stake. However, so far, China is reluctant to spend money in Afghanistan, because the interest rate is still too high to make it profitable,[64] as the standstill of China's Ainak Mine investment in Afghanistan has shown.

China is, without a doubt, increasing its leverage on Afghanistan whilst the USA completely reduced its footprint by August 31, 2021. Up to this date, China has shown a low profile in Afghanistan. This may change if security turns to the better or to the worse. In a worst-case scenario, trans-national terrorism from Afghanistan under Taliban rule may spill massively over into Xinjiang province. In this case, a Chinese military intervention may be possible.

In any case, China will do everything to contain Afghanistan in terms of security and may support inter-Afghan reconciliation with an inclusive approach towards all stakeholders if the Taliban comply to a certain extent. By establishing special relations with the new Taliban regime, China has already created a comparative advantage for its strategic approach to Afghanistan and leverage on them. In a best-case scenario, if overall security under the Taliban allows, China may start with geo-strategic infrastructure projects and mine exploitation in Afghanistan relatively quickly within a timeframe up to 2025.

So far, China's policy in Afghanistan is not only addressing symptoms of the conflict but tackles some root causes by focusing on a mixture of diplomatic and economic support, investments and development assistance on a larger scale. In this context, China has introduced its neighbour Afghanistan to several international organisations and formats to be able to collaborate on a larger scale and promote collective security. On the other hand, the perception that China has negative intentions appears still to be stronger in and around Afghanistan than the (undoubtedly) overall need for multilateral cooperation in the region that China is promoting. Regarding cultural soft power influence (lifestyle, education, social norms, or moral standards) it needs to be considered that a majority of the Afghan population tends to be neither open to Western nor to Chinese influence.

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[64] Farshid Hakimyar in the Webinar "China's Role in Afghanistan."

In another best-case scenario, China will provide any support needed for stabilisation, recovery and peaceful reconciliation of Afghanistan out of strategic reasons, even if this process may last another 50 years. The time factor appears to be in favour of China and the Taliban, but both actors have to move forward and deliver prosperity, social welfare and the rule of law according to international norms and standards.

In a realistic scenario, China will choose a dualistic approach: On the one hand launch regional infrastructure projects, on the other hand continue to promote bilateral agreements with neighbouring states that may serve China's interests best. The bilateral approach, however, may not serve the Central and South Asian region as a whole, referring to the massive economic crisis and overall poverty. Instead, a comprehensive security and development agreement on a regional and multilateral basis would add a different dimension. Relatively new institutions like the SCR may serve this regional approach to achieve overall stability in the long run. Economic and security cooperation is the only way forward for China – with the test case of Afghanistan as a vibrant example.

Part III

Challenges and Perspectives for a Three-dimensional European China-Strategy: Competition, Rivalry and Cooperation

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Encounter in the Low Earth Orbit and Outer Space

Doris Vogl

Axel Monse/Shutterstock.com

The European Space strategy – challenges and perspectives

At the 13th European Space Conference in January 2021, four main priorities were presented: Europe's strategic autonomy in space, development of secure connectivity, development of the existing flagship programs Copernicus and Galileo, in the frame of digital and green transition, and the positioning of Europe as a hub for space entrepreneurship in the world.[1] The Low Earth Orbit (LEO)was assigned special strategic importance, since the capability of protecting satellite navigation or communication systems in the case of conflict has become crucial. The next step in the development of the Low Earth Orbit is the future built-up of networks of several thousand satellites to enable access to the internet from any point of the Earth.

[1] See keynote address of the European Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton at the 13th European Space Conference, in Brussels. January 12, 2021, https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-200898.

Since nearly all named priorities are embedded in the European security and defence strategy, the relationship between Brussels and China regarding space policy is of considerable relevance. In Part I of this volume, Anton Dengg analyses current trends and developments for the increasingly relevant domain LEO & Outer Space. According to his conclusion, there is little chance for Europe to stay separated from the competing major power blocs in space research and space technology due to financial reasons (see page 73).

The question remains, how the European Union is going to act vis-à-vis China under consideration of European "space policy guidelines" and which bilateral cooperative space programs are likely to be continued or come to an end.

Two issues must be taken into account when exploring the implementation of a European space strategy. Brussels is confronted with two specific problems that other major space players like the USA, Russia, and China are not confronted with:

- The institutional problem: NASA, Roscosmos and CNSA are fully under the control of their governments. However, in the case of ESA it should be noted that a number of financially strong non-EU member states such as the United Kingdom, Norway, and Switzerland are also members, with a relevant voice. On the other hand, EU-states such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, and Slovenia are not ESA members.

- The problem of the incoherent interests of some EU member states, e.g. France, Germany or Italy. France operates the only European rocket launch platform in French Guyana and has shown considerable efforts to position itself as a major space power. On the other hand, Germany can draw on a flourishing small rocket and satellite industry with considerable R&D resources. Italy and Luxembourg signed the NASA-led Artemis Accords as the only EU member states in October 2020.

ESA and EUSPA

In the EU Council conclusions of May 31, 2011, titled "Towards a space strategy for the European Union", Brussels emphasized its readiness to act in and through space for the first time.[2] Since then, space had been identified as a core enabler for European defence-related capabilities. The European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Defence Agency (EDA) subsequently concluded an administrative arrangement, initiating a cooperation between the two agencies. As issues of common interest, they declared civil-military synergies in Earth observation, European independence with regard to critical space technologies as well as the coordination of research and study results.[3]

The Space Strategy for Europe (2016)[4] finally laid the foundation for a coherent European policy line in the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and Outer Space. The strategy consists of four programs: Copernicus (initiated in 2014), Galileo (operational since 2016), Satellite Communications (GOVSATCOM), and the EU Space Surveillance and Tracking System (EU SST).[5] Although a common strategy paper has existed since 2016, implementation has lagged behind, due to the institutional reasons stated above. The strong dependency on the technological expertise of the European Space Agency was considered a political stumbling stone in Brussels. After several years of negotiation with ESA, the EU created the European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) in April 2021.The latter is supposed to cooperate closely with ESA on a permanent basis and to serve as a communicative hub for various EU institutions such

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[2] See link: https://www.copernicus.eu/sites/default/files/2018-10/COM-2011-0152.pdf, a first joint ESA/EC document on a European Strategy for Space was adopted on November 16, 2000.

[3] See *EDA fact sheet* "EDA & Space," https://eda.europa.eu/docs/documents/factsheet_-Defence_space_final_1.

[4] European Commission (October 2016), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, "Space Strategy for Europe," 10. https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/COM-2016-705-F1-EN-MAIN.PDF.

[5] For more detail on the four space programs, see *European Space Policy Institute* (2020), Europe, Space and Defence – From "Space for Defence" to "Defence of Space", ESPI Report 72, 34-36.

as the European Defence Agency (EDA), the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), and the European Satellite Centre (SatCen).

At the same time, the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) is supposed to interlink with defence initiatives at EU level, i.e. the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and the European Defence Fund (EDF), which form the basis of the European defence framework. Against this background the establishment of EUSPA is regarded as more than just a complementary and mutually reinforcing measure. It is generally considered as a major step forward in shaping a coherent European "top-down" space policy.

Since EUSPA is responsible for the security accreditation of all EU Space Programme components, the long-standing cooperation between ESA and the China Space Agency might be downsized significantly, due to security reasons. This would concern, in particular, the year-long exchange of Earth observation data within the frame of the bilateral Dragon Programme. The Dragon Programme between ESA and the NRSCC (National Remote Sensing Centre of China) under the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology has been in place since 2004, and Programme phase 4 (2016-2020) has already been completed. The central point of cooperation within the Dragon Programme is an exchange and joint exploitation of data collected from more than 30 European and Chinese Earth observation satellites. An ESA online brochure on Dragon-4-enthusiastic states:

> Dragon-4 has teamed up scientists to work on 28 projects and 77 sub-projects across a wide range of themes, which address societal issues facing Europe and China today. […] The volume of satellite data will increase substantially in the near future, providing even more research opportunities.[6]

Under the headline ESA – MOST China cooperation, Dragon-5 (2021-2024) will be officially opened within the framework of the 2021 Dragon Symposium, held online in July 2021. According to the Dragon-5 website, as many as 55 joint Chinese and European teams are addressing science and application development within 10 topics relating to Earth system science.[7] The topics include big data intelligent mining and the exploitation of satellite

[6] ESA e-brochure: http://dragon4.esa.int/ebrochure-executive-summary/#/6.
[7] See ESA website: http://dragon5.esa.int.

remote sensing on air quality, sea level rise or forest and grassland degradation. In view of recent security-related screening regulations at EU level, on the one hand, and the strong linkages between civilian economy and defence industrial base in the People's Republic, on the other hand, the near future of the Dragon-5 Programme could look rather bleak. The newly established EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) might reject the exchange of certain satellite data or research results, due to security concerns.

However, the extensive bilateral Dragon Programme and its related projects could also continue to exist as an important field of cooperation in the near future. What seems noteworthy as a side note: The public awareness of the Dragon Programme is extremely low.

Apart from the EU-China Dragon Programme, the new ESA director Josef Aschbacher sees the invitation for the ESA to participate in the planned Sino-Russian lunar station and joint trainings for astronauts quite positively.[8] When asked during an interview in April 2021 whether ESA wants to work more closely with Beijing, Aschbacher explained that in principle ESA remained open to any cooperation, as long as it was fair and to the benefit of both sides.[9] Former German ESA director Johann-Dietrich Wörner has a similarly welcoming attitude: he openly advocates inclusiveness vis-à-vis China in Outer Space activities.[10]

In the context of Earth observation data exchange the European Space Agency started diversifying its networking portfolio in 2020 by creating the

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[8] infoSat, April 23, 2021, https://www.infosat.de/technik/esa-generaldirektor-josef-aschbacher-besorgt-ber-drohenden-austritt-der-russen.

[9] Alexander Stirn, "Neuer ESA Chef: Wir müssen bereit sein mehr Risiko einzugehen," *Spektrum*, March 23, 2021, https://www.spektrum.de/news/neuer-esa-chef-wir-muessen-bereit-sein-mehr-risiko-einzugehen/1848406; relevant interview excerpt in German: "Grundsätzlich gilt: Die ESA ist offen für jegliche Zusammenarbeit. So eine Kooperation muss jedoch stets fair und zum Vorteil beider Partner sein. Bekommen wir das hin, können wir auch stärker mit China kooperieren."

[10] DW-Interview, April 12, 2021, Ex-ESA-Chef: "Europäer Ende des Jahrzehnts auf dem Mond", https://www.dw.com/de/ex-esa-chef-europ%C3%A4er-ende-des-jahrzehnts-auf-dem-mond/a-57118251, relevant interview excerpt in German: "Ich würde es sehr begrüßen, wenn europäische und amerikanische Astronauten auch in Zukunft mit den Russen fliegen und wenn russische Kosmonauten mit den Amerikanern fliegen. Wenn ein Traum erlaubt ist, dann hoffe ich, dass sich das noch Richtung China öffnet."

so-called Covid-19 Earth Observing Dashboard, which uses NASA as well as Japanese (JAXA) Earth observation data, together with European Copernicus data.[11] The question therefore arises whether the two ESA Earth observation cooperation frames, i.e. Dragon-5 and the EO-Dashboard can be merged into a single global program.

Incoherent Space industry interests

In addition to the political coordination problems of Brussels with ESA, a lack of cohesion among European national actors can also be observed. In view of the rapid increase in services provided by satellite systems, all EU member states with space industries are striving and competing at a national level, vying for an advantageous position in the rapidly expanding space market. Particularly the German and French space industries make no secret of long-standing divergences of interest. The only current European spaceport is under French control and to date the launching service has constituted a promising source of income for the French government, whereas Germany is highly ambitious in the field of small rocket development, with a focus on commercial approaches to space travel.[12]

In March 2021, France organised its first military exercise in space with the participation of Germany's space agency and the US Space Force. This space operation was not only a first for France but also for Europe. So far, European countries have only participated in this kind of manoeuvres as guests under US command.

The securitisation trend in space is reflected in the training's threat scenarios. The French National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) in Toulouse simulated eighteen hypothetical "crisis events", including an attack on a French satellite by foreign agents wanting to capture its data or destroy it,

[11] The EO dashboard is an interactive data resource making public the impacts of pandemic-related restrictions around the world through the lens of earth observation satellites, see www.eodashboard.org.

[12] The French spaceport in French Guiana/Kourouwill not be needed for the launch of small rockets as the German space industry is striving for its own access to space. When launching its first military nanosatellite BRI- II in March 2021, the Netherlands selected the US based company Virgin Orbitto carry out the launch instead of using French facilities.

and wayward space debris penetrating the atmosphere and threatening the population. The one-week exercise was codenamed AsterX in memory of the first French satellite, launched in 1965.

This first European military exercise in space did not go unnoticed in China. A commentary by Lan Shunzhang in the Chinese online journal *Military Daily*, expressed some unease about France's space ambitions:

> If France takes a pre-emptive step in the space or secures its position as a strong space power, it will have strategic independence in the domain, and consequently secure independence in other fields, maybe even advancing EU's strategic independence with France as a "bellwether." However, France's space-militarizing actions will undermine the international efforts to prevent a space arms race and are no good news for future space governance either.[13]

Indeed, the French space command has planned to expand significantly by 2025. Yet, it might appear overambitious when Radio France International announces in the frame of the AsterX exercise that "…Paris works to cement its position as the world's third-largest space power."[14]

A second illustrative example of the lack of cohesion of national space industries in Europe are the Artemis Accords. In this volume, Anton Dengg already discussed contents and intentions of the Artemis Accords.[15] Just to recall, these accords were initiated by US authorities and NASA with a focus on guidelines for future space industry. Out of 27 European Union member states only Luxembourg and Italy signed the accords, in November 2020. Against this background it is legitimate to wonder how two economically relatively insignificant EU members were able to opt out, even though the ESA only signed a few elements of the Artemis Accords.

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[13] Shunzhang Lan, "What's behind France's first-ever space-based military exercise," *China Military Online*, March 17, 2021, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-03/17/content_10005441.htm.

[14] RFI, March 12, 2021, "Sky's the limit as space drills show off French military prowess," https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210312-sky-s-the-limit-as-space-drills-show-off-french-military-prowess-aster-x-florence-parly-emmanuel-macron-toulouse.

[15] See Dengg, Part I of this publication.

The scope of the so-called Lunar Gateway MoU between NASA and ESA, effective since October 2020, only concerns the development and operational activities to build and launch the international Lunar Gateway.[16] ESA will receive three flight opportunities for European astronauts to travel to and work on the Lunar Gateway.[17] However, operations beyond the lunar Gateway, such as corporate space mining on the surface of the Moon – fiercely criticised by China, Russia, and some developing countries – are not included in the ESA-NASA Lunar Gateway memorandum. What counts for the side of critical nations, including China: Neither EU authorities nor major EU member states have shown any interest in fully participating in the activity frame of the Artemis Accords. This significantly reduces the enforcement power of the Artemis agreement.

Windows of opportunity

A main objective of this sub-chapter is to analyse which aspects of the existing European space strategy may speak for the continuation of cooperation with China and which ones are conflicting with Chinese interests. The space strategy of the European Union is young and will definitely undergo further amendments and adaptations.

For the time being, an additional window of opportunity has opened for the EU to gain international profile as a space power. This opportunity is closely linked to the current geopolitical dilemma regarding the future of space politics. As of July 2021, all space powers are calling for "rule of law" or "binding uniform code of conduct" in the LEO sphere and Outer Space. Russia and China are in favour of an agreement at the UN level with the involvement and say of the Global South. Countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, and England prefer a binding solution without the participation of UN bodies. The world is confronted with an impasse situation of two adverse blocks. Leading Western industrialised nations have no interest whatsoever in seeing themselves being outvoted on key points of

[16] China remains excluded from the Lunar Gateway, whereas Russia declined to participate despite an official NASA invitation.

[17] For details see ESA website, https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Human_and_Robotic_Exploration/Gateway_MoU_and_Artemis_Accords_FAQs.

a new UN space treaty by a majority of developing countries, led by Russia and China. Even though a growing number of countries is urging for the formulation of guidelines on space operations, similar to international traffic rules or the oceanic law, consensus between the major stakeholders US, Russia, China or the EU seems highly unlikely.

Considering this precarious context, a proactive European Union diplomacy could play the role of a game changer. In the report "European Space Strategy in a Global Context" (2020), the Vienna-based European Space Policy Institute (ESPI) voices a strong plea for a daring and self-assertive European space diplomacy. By underlining the necessity of a universal code of conduct in Outer Space and the rapidly growing orbital congestion problem, ESPI points at Europe's role as mediator and facilitator on the global diplomatic stage:

> …Europe does not favour hard force and deterrence to safeguard the strategic objective of ensuring the safety and security of its space infrastructure. The preferred way Europe can square the circle is to leverage its diplomatic channels to push forward practical initiatives aimed at achieving convergence of interests among states and other entities conducting space activities.[18]

In view of the complex geopolitical situation, the question remains whether the European Union has the leverage and diplomatic weight to play an effective role as a mediator, with the overall objective of a universal code of conduct for the LEO sphere and Outer Space.

Competition and rivalry

According to a German SWP research paper, the home countries of leading satellite-producing companies – i.e. the US, followed by China – will have extensive potential for political influence through "internet from space".[19] However, due to financial restrictions at the EU level, European companies

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[18] ESPI (2020), "European Space Strategy in a Global Context," *ESPI Report 75*, 80.

[19] Daniel Voelsen (2021), "Internet from Space - How New Satellite Connections Could Affect Global Internet Governance," *SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik)* research paper 3, April 12, 2021, introductory abstract, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2021RP03_InternetFromSpace.pdf.

have, at present, little chance to be part of such a "global information oligopoly". Within the framework of the oligopoly scenario only the two highly adverse superpowers would control the internet's global infrastructure and the global information flows. For future development the outline of a second scenario, titled "regulated competition", seems to offer more opportunities for European space industry.

Yet, the latter – more promising – scenario should not obscure the fact that China has already penetrated far into the global LEO and the space market, and that European space industry is not in a favourable starting position. It is assumed that Chinese competitors, like the state-owned CASIC (China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation), CASC (China aerospace Science and Technology Corporation), and Galaxy Space, receive substantial public funding. This is definitely not the case when speaking about European space industry projects.

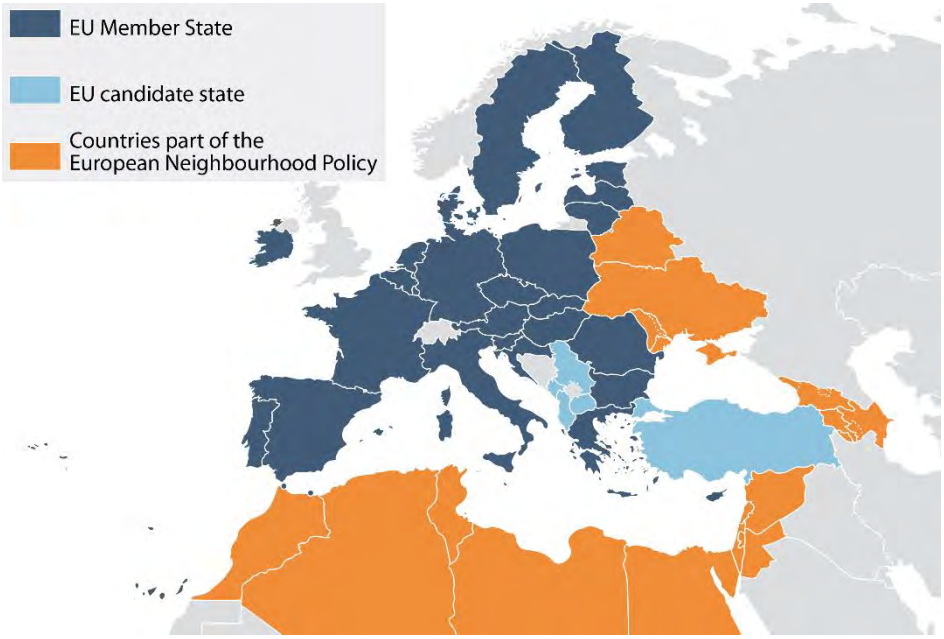
Most Chinese space technology export destinations are signalling a particular strategic interest in closer geographical neighbourhoods, like Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, or Thailand. However, with a focus on selling all-inclusive "In Orbit Delivery Contracts," the China Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC) has exported communication satellites to Belarus, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.[20] The existing Chinese export destinations like Belarus, Nigeria, Ethiopia or the DR Congo are rather close to European Union geostrategic spheres of influence.

In this particular regard, Brussels is confronted not only with economically competitive Chinese companies, but also geopolitically with robust elements of Chinese objectives of space diplomacy. Systemic rivalry is clearly reflected by a lack of personal data protection and big data transmission via Chinese satellite systems on the basis of bilateral governmental agreements without prior democratic accountability and oversight.

[20] For more details see *ESPI report 75*, 47.

The Narrow Eurostrategic Orbit – Challenges and Perspectives

Doris Vogl



Data sources: European Commission, European External Action Service

In this chapter the narrow strategic orbit of the European Union is discussed. The uncommon designation "narrow orbit" for a geographical specification was given preference, since in this publication different spaces and their strategic importance are addressed in particular. However, the term "European Neighbourhood" would have been equally appropriate to designate all those countries that are located outside the EU area but are considered to be embedded in the European neighbourhood. To further strengthen this embedment, the instrument of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004. If the comparison with China may be allowed, the ENP could also be interpreted as a European "One Belt" initiative for non-EU countries in the surrounding Southern and Eastern periphery. In May 2011, a so-called New ENP was supposed to

reinforce the existing funding conditions for the 16 partner countries[1] under the slogan "more funds for more reform." In other words, more additional funds were made available, but with a more mutual accountability. The launching statement of Štefan Füle, then EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, conveys a rather confident attitude:

> A number of our neighbours, both in the East and in the South, are engaging in a transformation process out of which they want to emerge as more democratic and more prosperous societies. The EU needs to respond with determination and ambition, through a new approach to the ENP, drawing the right lessons from our experience so far and addressing the challenges of a fast-changing neighbourhood.[2]

The same confidence in the lasting attractiveness of the European project for ENP partner countries is still reflected in the EU Global Strategy of June 2016:

> Under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), many people wish to build closer relations with the Union: our enduring power of attraction can spur transformation in these countries.[3]

A full decade has passed since the introduction of the New European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011, and the expected momentum towards Europe has not materialized. Quite on the contrary, a new security risk has emerged with the drift of ENP partners into the sphere of influence of other non-European actors.

Accordingly, the present priority challenge for the narrow orbit of the European Union has taken on a more defensive character. As Ivan Krastev and Stephen Homes (The Light that Failed, 2019) have pointedly emphasized, the European project has largely lost its normative appeal and the challenge is now about winning back the countries surrounding the Union:

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[1] The 16 ENP partner countries are to the South: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia; to the East: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine; see https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/policy/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp.

[2] European Commission press release, May 25, 2011, "A new and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy," https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_11_643.

[3] EUGS, June 2016, executive summary, 9.

> The unipolar Age of Imitation was a period when liberalism shed its capacity for self-criticism. The expectation that others should adopt Western-style liberal democratic institutions and norms seemed as natural as the rising of the sun. Not only is this period behind us, but the democratic wave it was expected to unleash has proved disappointingly ephemeral.[4]

A second topical challenge is already mentioned in the EU Global Strategy 2016, i.e. actively promoting resilience in EU-surrounding regions.[5] The respective announcement at the time was projected from a European position of strength. In the meantime, however, as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown-shaken economies, the issue of insufficient resilience has also shifted inside the EU area. There is no question that improving the level of systemic resilience of EU member states now has gained priority over supporting ENP countries and regions.

The above-mentioned challenges for the narrow eurostrategic orbit are certainly not exacerbated by lack of perspective. Luuk van Middelaar notes "dynamic resilience" and the "mobilization of unimagined forces" for the European Union in the face of the Covid-19 crisis;[6] he also observes a closing of ranks within EU-institutions in order to regain strength. The question remains, however, whether the momentum of a more assertive and united EU appearance will be sufficient to regain external normative appeal in the neighbourhood regions.

Common findings of the case studies Serbia, Belarus and Turkey

In Part II of this publication, the contributions by Predrag Jureković (Serbia), Christoph Bilban (Belarus) and Walter Posch (Turkey) analyse the present Chinese footprint within the inner circle of the European neighbourhood.[7] The geographic location of the three countries grouped in the "narrow orbit"

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[4] Ivan Krastev, Stephen Holmes (2019), *The Light that Failed – A Reckoning*, 204.

[5] EUGS (2016), 23, cit.: "Together with its partners, the EU will therefore promote resilience in its surrounding regions." cit.end.

[6] Luuk van Middelaar (2021), *Das europäische Pandämonium* (German edition), Eng. edition available by October 2021), cit.: "Die Europäische Union hat im ersten Jahr der Pandemie dynamische Spannkraft bewiesen. Der Covid-Ausbruch verursachte Konflikte, Misstrauen und Fehlschläge, mobilisierte aber auch ungeahnte Kräfte und brachte gewaltige Veränderungen in Gang."cit.end.

[7] The wider ENP circle comprises the MENA countries Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Syria etc.

of eurostrategic influence differs significantly. The Western Balkan country of Serbia is located on the south-eastern flank of the EU, Belarus on the north-eastern fringe, and Turkey, although an ENP partner, is not located on the European continental mass but is considered Asia Minor.

The strongest common factor in the three contributions is a certain frustration with the European Union. In comparison, the impact of recent and current Chinese Covid-19 diplomacy plays a minor role. In the case of Serbia and Turkey, the frustration with Brussels is due to what is perceived as a dragged-out association process. Predrag Jureković states in his contribution *Serbia – China's Preferred Partner in the Western Balkans* on the side of the European Union "weakening credibility in its integration policy towards the Western Balkans since 2010" as well as "weaknesses in the EU's strategic communication."[8] Walter Posch also emphasizes in his contribution *Ambitions without Direction: a Short Remark on Turkey-China Relations* Ankara's years of frustration with a slow EU association process:

> Even so, and almost expectedly, it was once again frustration with the EU when Ankara was disappointed in 2007 with the enlargement process that pushed Turkey closer to China.[9]

Turkey has been listed as EU candidate country since 1999. For reasons of backsliding in the areas of democratization, rule of law and human rights, the accession negotiations with Turkey have been effectively frozen since June 2018. Serbia was granted EU candidate status in 2012; as per August 2021 is has opened only eighteen accession chapters and closed two chapters. There remains the strategic challenge for Brussels to pursue the strengthening of good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans and Turkey on the one hand, and to consequently foster political reform and the rule of law in the frame of enlargement on the other hand. This objective is clearly formulated in the executive summary of the EU Global Strategy 2016:

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[8] Jureković, 139, cit.: "These misperceptions are partly due to the EU's weakening credibility in its integration policy towards the Western Balkans since 2010. The poor public opinion in Serbia highlights weaknesses in the EU's strategic communication." cit.end.

[9] Posch, 194; see also 196, cit.: "In 2016, frustrated with the lack of progress regarding Turkey's EU accession process, Erdoğan would float the idea of abandoning the membership process altogether and to apply for full membership at the SCO." cit.end.

> Under the current EU enlargement policy, a credible accession process grounded in strict and fair conditionality is vital to enhance the resilience of countries in the Western Balkans and of Turkey.[10]

Belarus' frustration is of more recent origin and relates to the perception of a supposedly externally orchestrated colour revolution in the aftermath of the presidential elections of August 2020. From 2014 until August 2020, without the status of ENP membership or the aspiration of joining the EU, Belarus' foreign policy orientation can be classified as slightly pro-European with the pragmatic aim to outbalance the – at that time unwelcome – influence of Moscow.

Another common finding that relates to the strategic intents of the Chinese side is the conclusion that a rapprochement with Brussels or an admission to the EU is considered positive on the part of the PR China. This finding contradicts the assumption that Beijing is working by covert means against the European enlargement policy. As Christoph Bilban underlines in his contribution *The Sino-Belarusian Relationship: Asymmetric and Symbolic* Beijing's main strategic interest is about access to European markets: "Establishing a presence in Belarus is arguably one of Beijing's core interests, as the country is a steppingstone to the markets of the EU and EAEU."[11] From this perspective, the fact that Belarus suspended its membership in the EU's Eastern Partnership on June 28, 2021 was definitely perceived as disadvantageous by Beijing authorities.

Predrag Jureković argues in the same vein regarding Serbia's EU member candidate status:

> Thus, China does not seem to have any "objections" to Serbia's EU integration. It would probably even consider Serbia's EU membership to be geo-economically advantageous for itself, since Serbia would be an advocate of China within the EU.[12]

As for Turkey, in view of repeated official statements of the Turkish president to consider abandoning the EU membership process altogether and the freezing of accession negotiations since 2018, the intended bridging function to the European Union seems to play a rather secondary role.

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[10] EUGS, executive summary, 9.
[11] Bilban, 164; see also 182.
[12] Jureković, 141.

Competition and rivalry

With full intent, this publication does not focus on the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), the academic literature already published on this subject is extensive and plentiful. However, when examining China's footprint in eurostrategic spaces, there is no getting around this complex thematic issue. Especially in the narrow orbit of European strategic interests, the Belt & Road Initiative currently plays a weighty role. It is an undisputed fact that in the geographical European neighbourhood, the BRI constitutes the main competitive element between the European Union and the PR China in the economic sphere. At the same time, it is difficult to draw a clear dividing line between competition and rivalry, since the financing of BRI large-scale projects has so far not been tied to the condition of far-reaching transparency and politico-economic reforms, like in the case of carefully scrutinized EU funding. Brussels quite rightly sees the normative aspect of its neighbourhood policy thwarted when those values that are defined as the systemic basis for European member states are neglected or even completely disregarded in BRI funding procedures.

An even more acute picture in regard to systemic rivalry emerges in the case of Serbia, which as candidate for EU membership already has a number of reform chapters in progress. In his essay, Predrag Jureković lays open the tangible growing political influence of a system that does not count European values among its own:

> Only with the help of its loans and related infrastructure projects, a few investments and very skilful "Corona diplomacy" has China managed to massively expand its political influence in Serbia within a few years.[13]

As examined by Jureković in further detail, respective influence is reflected in mainstream media, opinion polls and public statements of Serbian politicians. However, the exercise of political influence via BRI-projects and investments on European soil is categorically negated in Chinese official or semi-official statements and documents. Rather, it is placatingly emphasized that China has always supported European integration efforts and that therefore BRI-activities are not working against enlargement and integration

[13] Jureković, 141.

policies of the European Union but do play a reinforcing role. This diplomatic standard line of argument in the sense of "mutual reinforcement," can also be found in the 2020 report of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to the European Union (CCCEU):

> While the rise of China and the integration of Europe are important developments in their own right, the exchanges and mutual reinforcement between the two are even more remarkable.[14]

Outside diplomatic and semi-diplomatic circles, the argument of mutual reinforcement shows less presence. In a security policy analysis of the National Defence University of the PLA – published in 2018 – the question of systemic rivalry in EU neighbourhood countries is openly addressed, in reference to the basic cleavage between European and Chinese development theory:

> The EU has always held that if it can promote the democratic process of its adjacent neighbouring countries, regional peace will be brought about naturally, thus realizing its own security.
> […] The "Arab Spring" taking place in the Middle East and North Africa was undeniably caused by the deeply embedded problems of some regional countries, but it was also related to the wrong regional policy previously pursued by the EU. Democracy can be the catalyst for development, but it is by no means the sufficient condition for development. Democracy is not bound to bring about peace and development, and the form of democracy is not only one but can vary according to different national and social conditions.[15]

In the context of the above note should be noted that it does not include any statement declaring the Western Balkans region or other ENP regions inapt for European-style democracy. Only North Africa is cited as a negative example for failed ENP policy.

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[14] China Chamber of Commerce to the European Union (CCCEU), *Acting for Common Future*, "2020 Recommendation Report," 14, http://en.ccceu.eu/PDF/CCCEU2020RecommendationReport-ActingforCommonFuture_Updated_20201102.pdf.

[15] Shuo Wang (2018), "The Impact of Brexit and the Refugee Problem on the European Union," in: Institute for Strategic Studies, National Defence University of People's Liberation Army, China (ed.), *International Strategic Relations and China's National Security*, 192-193.

Some scattered voices from the Chinese social science establishment – not being part of the national thinktank community with a major focus on security policy – speak a surprisingly direct language with regard to the delicate topic of political influence through Belt & Road projects:

> Even if the current propaganda does not declare that it is more important than economic considerations, the Belt and Road clearly enhances China's national interests in the international political dimension: the promotion of the international image of "responsible powers;" the positive shift of China's "images;" and the improvement of international influence.[16]

Apart from the issue of political fallout concerning BRI projects and adverse consequences for European neighbourhood policy, the question of the strategic trajectory of the Belt & Road Initiative is subject of most security policy analysis on this topic. For years, there has been a lively debate about the extent to which the Belt & Road Initiative follows a geopolitical master plan or whether it is rather about macroeconomic interests that dominate the global Silk Road project. It would be misplaced to draw a hasty conclusion in this respect, especially in view of the fact that there is an ongoing debate in the ranks of Chinese academia, which also appears divided on this issue:

> Some scholars believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is to get rid of the containment of the United States through "going westward and southward." It is a "strategic breakthrough" and a "strategic transfer," not a change in investment direction, neither is it a transfer of excess industry.
> […] We should all adopt a cautious attitude towards the overemphasis on the "strategic breakthrough" nature and the "capacity release" function of the "Belt and Road." Both views exaggerate one aspect of the contradiction and lack systematic and strategic thinking.[17]

Further briefly addressed should be the strategic considerations on the side of ENP partners and candidate countries, which often enough follow short-term, pragmatic concepts. One increasingly popular tactic is to play the "China card" against Brussels. In this respect, particularly US-American

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[16] Jianyi Piao and Yupeng Ma (2021), "Overall Layout of Diplomatic Work under the Conceptual Framework of the Belt and Road," in: Linggui Wang (ed.), *China's Major Country Diplomacy: Chinese Characteristics, Connotations and Paths*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 178.

[17] Ibid., 176.

authors are urging the European Union to play a more pro-active role in its neighbourhood regions.[18]

Returning to the starting point of this sub-chapter, namely the competing capability of the EU in its neighbourhood in view of the success of the Belt & Road Initiative, the recent comprehensive upgrade of the *Connecting Europe Facility* (CEF) of July 7, 2021, should be shortly outlined. The so-called CEF 2 is a new sustainable finance instrument with the aim for sustainable investments in European infrastructure; but at second glance it appears to be Brussels' response to out-balance and limit the attractiveness of BRI financing facilities for EU member states.[19]

CEF 2 is also eligible for the EFTA states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, but for other third countries (acceding countries, EU candidates and potential candidates, ENP countries) involved in cross-border projects with EU member states "financial support should only be available if it is indispensable to the achievement of the objectives of those projects."[20]

Nota Bene: It would be premature to pass judgment on whether the above cited regulative "bottle neck" is too narrow for non-EU members to participate in large-scale CEF 2 projects. However, within the framework of BRI finance mechanisms no proof of "indispensability" to the achievement of project goals is required. For Western Balkans countries the CEF 2

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[18] See for example Madi Sarsenbayevand Nicolas Véron (2020), "European versus American Perspectives on the Belt & Road Initiative," cit.: "The EU should strengthen its involvement in its immediate neighbourhood (particularly Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries and North Africa) in order to reduce the current incentives that may exist for these countries to try to play China and the EU against each other." cit.end, in Journal: *China & World Economy*, Vol.28, Nr.2, 104.

[19] CEF 2 (2021 – 2027) will continue to fund key projects in the areas of transport, digital and energy with a significant overall budget of € 33.71 billion. Accordingly, the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) was established in April 2021 to facilitate CEF funding, for details see: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1153&qid=1629731501130&from=enand, https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/news-events/newsroom/agreement-2021-2027-connecting-europe-facility.

[20] Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 of the European Parliament and of the Council of July 7, 2021, establishing the Connecting Europe Facility and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) No 283/2014, in: *Official Journal of the European Union*, July 14, 2021, L 249/48, par. (60).

regulation mentions specific support in paragraph (59), wrapped in somewhat opaque wording:

> The Union should seek coherence and synergies with the Union programmes for external policies, including pre-accession assistance following the engagements undertaken in the context of the Commission Communication of 6 February 2018 entitled "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans".[21]

On closer inspection, paragraph (59) seems much more like a non-binding recommendation than a regulation. It therefore remains to be seen whether the *Connecting Europe Facility 2* will produce – as planned – a substantial competitive advantage over the Belt & Road Initiative.

Options for cooperation

In the discussion of cooperation opportunities for the European Union with China, the following areas are usually listed: renewable energy production and energy efficiency, low-carbon cities, clean energy, exchange of earth observation data, sustainable development cooperation, green finance mechanisms, global vaccine support and distribution. All of these topics are addressed in more detail or mentioned in the chapter on the strategic "broader orbit" of the EU. This chapter is intended to touch on a subject that ranks high among China's strategic ambitions for bilateral cooperation: the development of global standards for Central Banks Digital Currencies (CBDCs).

The subject of CBDC fits in with "narrow orbit" considerations, as the Euro – introduced in 1999 and currently used by 19 EU member states,[22] is regarded by the finance world mainly as a regional currency. Within non-EU member territories, the Euro was adopted by Montenegro and Kosovo as sole currency; for the remaining Western Balkans currency exchange rates are anchored to the Euro and cross-border currency flows in Euros are prevailing. In other ENP regions, the Euro does play a significant role as

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[21] Ibid., par. (59).

[22] The following eight EU member states are not included in the Eurozone: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

reserve currency, but USD-denominated SWIFT clearings are dominating (e.g. North African ENP countries).

The topic of Central Bank Digital Currencies also fits into a multi-facetted, security-related debate, since the risk of unstable currencies and hyperinflation is regarded as a core aspect of macro-economic threat scenarios. Accordingly, the European Central Bank (ECB) steers the monetary policy of the Euro area in the framework of a wider strategic perspective.[23] The lately updated ECB monetary policy strategy, adopted on July 8, 2021, does not address the issue of CBDC. Yet, shortly afterwards, on July 14, 2021, the European Central Bank announced the decision to launch a digital Euro project with a 24 months investigation phase.[24] To summarize in brief, as of August 2021 Europe is at the beginning of an investigation phase with the aim to address key issues regarding design and distribution of a future digital Euro.

The development status of China's CBDC offers aa more advanced picture: Since April 2020, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) has been conducting large-scale pilot programs in the three cities Shenzhen, Suzhou and Chengdu[25] and the Xiong'an New Area, a development hub for the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei economic triangle region. Private and corporate entities were included in a comprehensive rollout of CBDC-testing in retail settings. Against this background, China is very likely the first major economy in the near future to launch a sovereign digital currency, named as DCEP (Digital

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[23] ECB Economic Bulletin (2021/5), The ECB's monetary policy strategy statement, cit.: "The monetary policy strategy of the ECB is both guided and bound by its mandate conferred by the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The primary objective of the ECB is to maintain price stability in the euro area. Without prejudice to the price stability objective, the Eurosystem shall support the general economic policies in the EU with a view to contributing to the achievement of the Union's objectives as laid down in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union." cit.end,
https://www.ecb.europa.eu/home/search/review/html/ecb.strategyreview_monpol_strategy_statement.en.html.

[24] ECB press release, July 14, 2021, "Eurosystem launches digital euro project," https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2021/html/ecb.pr210714~d99198ea23.en.html.

[25] The population of each of these Chinese cities ranges between 10 - 17 million, equivalent to that of a midsize European country.

Central Electronic Payment, chin.: Shuzi Renminbi) in Chinese sources, in Western literature referred to as digital Yuan (e-CNY). As a first step to present the e-CNY to a larger global public, the digital Yuan will be applicable in February 2022 inside the Winter Olympics facilities. However, foreign users will not be able to use the digital currency outside the Olympic Village.

Almost simultaneously with the European Central Bank announcement on the development of the digital Euro, the Central Bank of China published a first open report on DCEP, titled "Progress of Research and Development of e-CNY in China," on July 16, 2021. Addressing the international community, the report states:

> Meanwhile, the PBOC is willing to participate actively in international exchanges of views on digital fiat currency and discuss standard-setting in an open and inclusive manner, in order to jointly advance the development of the international monetary system.[26]

Indeed, China is pushing hard in the diplomatic sphere[27] for common global standards for digital currencies and for increased coordination among international financial authorities. The PBOC digital currency research institute has already been working on proposals for international standards since 2014.

Beijing's strong strategic commitment to actively participate in formulating international rules on digital currency and digital tax has found its way into

[26] State Council of the PR China, July 17, 2021, http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/ministries/202107/17/content_WS60f211a4c6d0df57f98dd21f.html.

[27] At the G20 summit (November 21, 2020), Xi Jinping called "to discuss developing the standards and principles for central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) with an open and accommodating attitude, and properly handle all types of risks and challenges, while pushing collectively for the development of the international monetary system," cited in CAIXIN online journal, December 3, 2020, "China's digital currency ambitions lead the world," https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Caixin/In-depth-China-s-digital-currency-ambitions-lead-the-world.

the agenda of past EU-China negotiations.[28] However, Beijing's global CBDC ambitions do not fall on fertile ground in Brussels. The rather reluctant attitude on the European side is – among other indicators – reflected in official EU statements and press releases. While the European Commission reports on discussing "the international role of the Euro and of the RMB" (see footnote 28), Chinese official announcements highlight the promotion of "the internationalization of the Euro and the Renminbi."[29]

In regard to the internationalization of the Renminbi, any future cross-border digital currency agreements with a major economic power like the EU would definitely create a new competitive advantage for China. The EU, on the other hand, already holds the second place as global reserve currency (20.6%)[30] and as invoicing and settlement currency for trading.[31] The current share of the Renminbi (Chinese Yuan) of global currency reserves reported to the IMF is comparably low with 2.4% in the first quarter of 2021,[32] even though finance analysts[33] predict that the Renminbi might rise to between 5% and 10% by 2030.

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28 In regard to the 8th High-Level EU-China Trade and Economic Dialogue, see European Commission press release, July 30, 2020, "A range or regulatory issues in the financial services area were also discussed, including cooperation on green finance, equivalence assessments, and the international role of the Euro and of the RMB," https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1419.

29 See website of Ministry of Commerce of the PR of China, July 28, 2020, Liu He and Dombrovski co-chair the 8th China-EU Economic and Trade High-level Dialogue, "both sides are committed to continue promoting the internationalization of the euro and the renminbi (author's translation)," chin. text: shuangfangzhiliyujixutuidong Ouyuan he Renminbi guojihua (双方致力于继续推动欧元和人民币国际化), http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/news/202007/20200702987222.shtml.

30 According to IMF 2021, Q1 data the Euro's share amounted to 20.6%, following the U.S. dollar's share of currency reserves with 59.9%, https://data.imf.org/?sk=E6A5F467-C14B-4AA8-9F6D-5A09EC4E62A4.

31 See ECB (2021), *Annual Review of the international role of the Euro*, chap. 2.4, "Use of the Euro as invoicing currency," https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/ire/html/ecb.ire202106~a058f84c61.en.html#toc9.

32 IMF 2021, Q1 data, see footnote 29.

33 PYMNTS, September 4, 2020, "Morgan Stanley Sees Yuan Rising as Reserve Currency," https://www.pymnts.com/news/international/2020/analyst-see-yuan-rising-as-reserve-currency/.

Until recently, Beijing has been rather transparent in voicing the long-term goal of the strong RMB-internationalization drive, i.e., to break the overwhelming prevalence of the US Dollar as a medium of exchange in global trade. Given the simple fact that about 40% of international payments are transacted in US Dollars, all registers of the Chinese anti-hegemonism narrative are applicable.

At the same time, the Chinese side has become worried about an increasing negative perception of its comprehensively prepared, future digital currency. In response, the former governor of the People's Bank of China, Zhou Xiaochuan, warns against an exaggerated international promotion of the digital Yuan:

> China and other East Asian countries can steadily push ahead on cross-border transactions using digital currency. That process could come with the internationalization of the yuan, which should not be overly promoted. And China should avoid being accused of promoting "yuanization."[34]

In the context of Zhou Xiaochuan's recommendation, attention should be paid to one specific detail: Only East Asia is named as a geographical vector for the internationalization of the digital Yuan. This indicates a regionalization strategy, for the medium-term time horizon, instead of a globalization drive. Even if the digital Yuan will initially only have a presence in the Asian region during coming years, the global cross-border use of future CBDCs asks for new forms of international payment arrangements. A study of the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) concludes that central banks – the European Central Bank included – could ease current and future frictions by factoring "an international dimension into their CBDC designs from the outset."[35] Of course, the international dimension inevitably asks for negotiations and consensus among leading central banks. In other words, a minimum of cooperation is required.

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[34] Xiaochuan Zhou, "China's choices for a digital currency system," in *Asia Nikkei Journal*, February 22, 2021, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Caixin/Zhou-Xiaochuan-China-s-choices-for-a-digital-currency-system.

[35] Raphael Auer, Codruta Boar et.al., "CBDCs beyond borders: results from a survey of central banks," in *BIS Paper No.116*, June 11, 2021, 15, https://www.bis.org/publ/bppdf/bispap116.htm.

Returning to EU-China relations in regard to the – promising but uncertain – strategic space of future digital currencies leads to following conclusion: Not entirely closing the door for cooperation might be significant step on the European side. This requires an approach, which does not perceive the bilateral and international use of a forthcoming digital Yuan as a geopolitical threat[36] but as an unavoidable symptom of a global epochal technology change.

[36] In respect to the related debate see: Paul Blustein, April 26, 2021, "Who's Afraid of the Digital Renminbi?", *CIGI Online*, https://www.cigionline.org/articles/whos-afraid-digital-renminbi/; *Crypto Valley Journal*, June 2, 2021, "Digital Yuan ready for use as of 2022," https://cvj.ch/en/focus/background/digital-yuan-ready-for-use-as-of-2022/; *The Conversation*, May 10, 2021, "China's digital currency could be the future of money – but does it threaten global stability?", https://theconversation.com/chinas-digital-currency-could-be-the-future-of-money-but-does-it-threaten-global-stability-160560.

The Broader Eurostrategic Orbit – Challenges and Perspectives

Doris Vogl

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This chapter is dedicated to the broader strategic orbit of the European Union. There is no exact definition in the European Union's Global Strategy (EUGS), as to which regions are located outside the European neighbourhood. The Global Strategy repeatedly refers to the "wider world" without indicating geographical details, like in the executive summary:

> To promote the security and prosperity of our citizens and to safeguard our democracies, we will manage interdependence, with all the opportunities, challenges and fears it brings about, by engaging the wider world.[1]

A more detailed specification of the broader European strategic orbit refers to countries "to the East stretching into Central Asia, and to the South down to Central Africa" (EUGS, 2016, 9). The main goal of the European Union vis-a-vis countries along the Southern and Eastern vector is – as explained in the EUGS - to support the resilience of governmental and social structures. The development of "more effective" migration policies is stated as additional strategic objective.[2] For the South in particular, i.e. Africa, a comprehensive policy package is announced:

> We will build stronger links between our trade, development and security policies in Africa, and blend development efforts with work on migration, health, education, energy and climate, science and technology, notably to improve food security.[3]

For the East, meaning Central Asia, European commitment intends "to support state-building and reconciliation processes in Afghanistan" (EUGS, 2016, 38) together with regional and international partners. In summary, it can be said that eurostrategic priorities for the South and East have remained largely the same since 2016 with a strong focus on resilience building and migration management.

Another more general commitment of the EUGS, with regard to engaging in the "wider world" across all regions, is the development of cooperative

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[1] EEAS (2016), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, 9. See also quote on page 17: "In fact, internal policies often deal only with the consequences of external dynamics. We will manage interdependence, with all the opportunities, challenges and fears it brings about, by engaging in and with the wider world."

[2] Ibid., "State and Societal Resilience to our East and South," 9. Original quote: "It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and to the south down to Central Africa. […] The EU will support different paths to resilience, targeting the most acute cases of governmental, economic, societal and climate/energy fragility, as well as develop more effective migration policies for Europe and its partners."

[3] Ibid., "Africa," 36.

relationships in order to bear global responsibility collectively.[4] However, no specific countries are named as potential partners of cooperation for global issues across the world, including the Low Earth Orbit and Outer Space. It is exactly under the headline "Cooperative Regional Orders" that the collaboration with major powers like the PR of China comes into play. The stated EUGS goal "to spur sharing global responsibilities"[5] accommodates, to some extent, in its fundamental objectives the Chinese narrative of the "community of common destiny for mankind."[6]

Common findings for Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Afghanistan

In Part II of this publication, three contributions offer situational analyses on China's footprint within the broader Eurostrategic orbit towards the South and the East: the African continent (Gerald Hainzl), the Arabian Peninsula in western Asia (Stephan Reiner) and Afghanistan in Central Asia (Markus Gauster). It is not easy to establish similarities between these inherently different locations in terms of their relationship with China, but it may nonetheless prove interesting:

- The first similarity shared by the three geographical areas is that they have a past of European imperialism. Even if Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia had not been colonised by European powers, they would still be part of the chess game of European spheres of influence. Therefore, in the collective memory of these societies, any political influence from Europe has negative connotations, due to historical reasons. The contributions of Markus Gauster, Gerald Hainzl and Stephan Reiner highlight that China can build on the strategic advantage of being a "political newcomer" as a major power and financial guarantor, without a loaded past. In addition, Beijing very

[4] Ibid., "Cooperative Regional Orders," 32. Original quote: "Across all regions, we will invest in cooperative relationships to spur shared global responsibilities."

[5] Cf. quote above.

[6] The Chinese slogan "Renlei mingyun gongtongti 人类命运共同体" was first used by General Secretary Hu Jintao in his report to the 18th CCP National Congress in November 2012. It was later included (2018) in the preamble of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. The more common English translation disseminated internationally via Chinese media and diplomats is somewhat incorrect and watered down into "community of shared future for mankind."

skilfully appropriates the main theme of the global struggle against hegemonism.

- The positive perception of China's foreign policy principle with regard to non-interference in internal affairs represents a second similarity in the conclusions of all three authors, although the future compliance with this principle is called into doubt.

> This position of strict non-interference in internal Arab affairs will be undermined in the future by its economic strength and cannot be maintained, not least because of global competition.[7]

- A third similarity is the argument that the recent withdrawal of Western powers economically and politically, within a very short timeframe, has resulted in increased Chinese presence. In other words, the enhanced Chinese footprint was partly caused by European and/or US economic and political neglect of the respective areas. The same argument is now already used for the case of Serbia in the "narrow orbit" of Eurostrategic interests (Jureković).

For both Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, it is concluded that China's backbone of influence on the ground is to be found in the infrastructure and financial sector against the background of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). By comparison, the military footprint appears negligible. Afghanistan shows quite a different picture, since Central Asia is thought of by Beijing as its security backyard. In this regard, Markus Gauster acknowledges a recent policy change on the part of China:

> China's engagement in Afghanistan represents a strategic test case to show its ability and capacity to achieve a secure and stable periphery. Therefore, China has switched from an economic- and assistance-driven approach (approx. between 2001-2011) to a more security-orientated approach (2011-2021).[8]

[7] Reiner, 218.
[8] Gauster, 249.

Regarding the military sphere, one prediction is made in all three contributions regarding the geographical "wider orbit:" China's drive to secure BRI facilities on the ground and protect Chinese personnel overseas will increase in the near future.[9]

Competition and rivalry

The three-dimensional EU China-Strategy of 2019 identifies possible fields of cooperation, but also addresses competition and rivalry. The problem of normative rivalry should be emphasised here, in particular, as it has been of increased intensity since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The comprehensive field of normative rivalry is closely connected with systemic rivalry. The long-lasting human rights discussion serves as the most illustrative example in this regard.

China's human rights tradition has always been critical vis-à-vis the UN Charter of Universal Human Rights. First of all, rights to social services and welfare are given priority to political rights; secondly the People's Republic state interests often limit human rights instead of human rights being a restriction of power for the state.[10] Discussing different patterns of discourse regarding the role and limits of state power means stepping into the arena of systemic rivalry.

When talking about normative rivalry between the European Union and China concerning human rights, it should not be overlooked that China is by no means an isolated actor but can draw on considerable discursive support from the developing South. This support cannot hastily be explained with economic promises and the pressure of a rising great power, but follows a more complex, multi-dimensional logic.

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[9] Gerald Hainzl, 230, original quote: "Although China's role grew significantly over the last ten to fifteen years, the military sector is still far behind the economic one. Therefore, in the near future Chinese efforts are likely to increase." Stephan Reiner, 218, original quote: "Therefore, China's military presence in the region is likely to increase in the medium term." Markus Gauster, 250, original quote: "In any case, China will do everything to contain Afghanistan in terms of security […]."

[10] Andrew Nathan and Randle Edwards (1986), *Human Rights in Contemporary China*, 43-47, 121-22.

When, in April 1993, the so-called *Bangkok Declaration* was signed by 34 Asian countries, the PR of China definitely did not have the economic leverage it has today. The Belt & Road Initiative, which took shape twenty years later, was not even on the planning horizon of the People's Republic of China. Among the signatories of the Bangkok Declaration were Southeast and East Asian countries, but also West Asian states like the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.[11]

In the Bangkok Declaration, the signatories articulated their resistance vis-à-vis a global normative framework decided by the United Nations and requested that human rights "must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds."[12]

One text passage of the Declaration in particular galvanised the organisers of the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, which followed briefly afterwards in June 1993:

> [The ministers and representatives of the Asian states] emphasise the principles of respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and the non-use of human rights as an instrument of political pressure.[13]

The abovementioned reference to a collective political statement - formulated almost three decades ago – very clearly exemplifies an inconvenient fact: With regard to normative rivalry, Europe was confronted with a robust front of countries in tandem with China – aiming at defining human rights on their own – long before the People's Republic stepped into the Eurostrategic orbit as a powerful player. The trend of political proclivities for non-democratic norms is growing and, even without a pro-active

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[11] In this context, it should be mentioned that Cyprus, which became an EU member state on May 1, 2004, was among the signatories, whereas Turkey was part of the group of 25 – mostly Western – observer states.

[12] The Bangkok Declaration, *Declaration of the Ministers and Representatives of Asian States*, Bangkok, March 29 – April 2, 1993, https://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/688605/bangkok-eng.pdf. Cf. also *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 17, 1993, "Preparatory Meeting of Asian Nations in Bangkok," 16.

[13] Ibid., paragraph 5.

approach, China is in a position to take full advantage of this development within the international community or in other international arenas.

At this point, it seems appropriate to draw a comparison between the UN human rights debates of 1993 and 2021. In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council is looking back on 15 years of existence. In this year anniversary of anniversary, debates are more polarised than ever regarding the human rights situation in the PRC. In fact, most of the countries that have been opposing non-interference in internal affairs already for decades have now rallied around China and are rejecting UN-led investigations in Xinjiang, Tibet or Hongkong.

During the 47th session of the UN Council of Human Rights, a joint statement of 40 countries denounced human rights violations in the PR of China and requested immediate and stepped-up UN engagement.[14] This call for action found immediate response in a joint statement from a total of 67 countries, emphasising the principle of non-interference and the rejection of "politicisation of human rights and double standards"[15] in the case of China.

A look at the list of the signatories shows the following development: The support for Beijing to challenge the normative supremacy of democracies has gained allies in Africa and West Asia; however, at the same time, a significant decline in support can be observed for Southeast and East Asia. In the Bangkok Declaration of 1993, all ten member states of the ASEAN signalled an anti-Western approach. The joint pro-China statement of June 2021 was only signed by Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, whereas major ASEAN states like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand or the Philippines refrained from signing.

As to the systemic rivalry between the European Union and China, the neutral stance of the vast majority of ASEAN states should be regarded a window of opportunity. The European approach towards human rights is

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14 *SwissInfo*, June 30, 2021, "Human Rights Council: Fundamental or fundamentally flawed," https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/human-rights-council--fundamental-or-fundamentally-flawed-/46744558.

15 Joint statement of 67 countries at the Interactive Dialogue on High Commissioner's annual report at the 47th session of the Human Rights Council on June 22, 2021, http://www.china-un.ch/eng/dbdt/t1886467.htm.

based on the European Charter of Human Rights and institutionalised, to an advanced degree, in the Council of Europe. The Council includes an impressive 47 member states, considering that only 27 are members of the European Union. Admittedly, the remaining members are not countries of the European "broader orbit." Yet, it is noteworthy that the Russian Federation, a member since 1996, despite increasing polarisation is still upholding its moratorium on the death penalty. Japan is included in the group of observer states; this observer group might be enlarged towards the East and the South in order to widen the normative radius of the Council of Europe.

As for the Chinese side, the normative rivalry in the human rights debate is currently directed towards global health policy. The "right to health" has been strikingly often mentioned by Chinese officials and state media since the Global Health Summit in May 2021, in direct connection with human rights. Under the headline "China takes forward the human rights cause," China Daily points out that the life expectancy of citizens of the PR of China has risen to more than 77 years, close to that of many developed countries.[16] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, underlines in a press conference that the elimination of malaria in China is far more than a national health policy success:

> The elimination of malaria is a notable feat of China's health endeavor and another major achievement in China's human rights cause, following the elimination of absolute poverty […]. Eliminating malaria is also a major contribution made by China to human health and the world human rights progress.[17]

Recalling the Global Health Summit of May 21, 2021, the Chinese proposal of an international forum on vaccine cooperation for vaccine-developing and producing countries to promote a "fair and equitable distribution of vaccines

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[16] Lu Guangjin, "China takes forward the human rights cause," *China Daily*, July 4, 2021, http://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2021-07/04/content_77605142.shtml.

[17] Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on June 30, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1888344.shtml.

around the world"[18] contains a certain nuance of subtle criticism to the address of the developed world. Of course, the spearhead of Chinese criticism regarding global vaccination policies is also directed at Europe, given the slow progress of the COVAX initiative in developing countries.

Carl Bildt, Swedish co-chair of the European Council of Foreign Relations, considers the fact that by the end of May 2021 only 0.3% of the total vaccines administrated globally had arrived at low-income countries a breeding ground for growing anti-Western and anti-European sentiments:

> Vaccine inequity risks not only endangering the global recovery, and giving an easier path to new variants, it also breeds global resentment that might be difficult to overcome.[19]

This warning also contains considerable security-policy significance.

Even though the normative rivalry between the European Union and China was put in this sub-chapter at the first place, the question of economic competition also plays an increasingly prominent role in the Eurostrategic broader orbit. Despite considerable systemic divergence, both economic systems follow the same logic and must therefore necessarily meet as competitors in emerging markets, such as the Gulf States or West Africa. It is mainly about market access and natural resources, since both the EU as well as the PRC are under pressure to look for new export markets and to secure the import of crude oil, copper, iron, gold or rare earths.

With regard to intergovernmental agreements China appears to pay little attention to the issue of corruption, although the latter is thoroughly investigated and severely punished at home. As for the Chinese private sector investing in Africa or Western Asia, the development economist Were Anzetse sees a certain laxity regarding compliance with the rule of law. She underlines that Chinese private companies should be held accountable to laws that apply in the PRC, even though they operate on the African

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[18] President Xi Jinping at the Global Health Summit, May 21, 2021, "Working together to Build a Global community of Health for All," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1877666.shtml.

[19] Carl Bildt, May 21, 2021, Global Health Summit 2021, https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/05/21/default-calendar/global-health-summit-2021.

continent.[20] European investors are thus at a clear disadvantage compared to Chinese companies, as they have to follow strict European regulations regarding environmental compatibility or financial transparency.

Currently, the EU holds the undisputed first place as a trading partner for goods in Africa with 28%, followed by China with less than 16%.[21] However, recent Eurostat data indicate that, over the last decade, only a minor increase in the flow of goods between EU and Africa can be observed, whereas the pandemic year 2020 is marked by a significant decline in terms of exported as well as imported goods.[22] 25 EU member states had a trade in goods surplus, to the detriment of African countries, with the exception of Slovenia and Spain.[23]

Even though the volume of European investments outnumbers Chinese investments by far, European capital largely flows into traditional sectors, like mining. Chinese investment appears more focused on non-traditional sectors (infrastructure, construction, manufacture); accordingly, Chinese companies are increasingly gaining foothold in key innovative sectors, like smart urbanisation or G5 communication technology.[24] Yet, concerning the highly competitive economic sphere, Gerald Hainzl also notes new opportunities in view of the new decoupling policy:

> The interest of European countries and others to take back production formerly outsourced to China is changing the whole setup for the continent. African countries are set to become a new geopolitical playground.[25]

The re-allocation of production industry out of China and geographically closer to the European Union would definitely create new job opportunities and facilitate the transfer of technological knowhow to underdeveloped regions in the European broader orbit.

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[20] Anzetse Were, Interview with *VIDC* on May 9, 2019, video link: https://www.facebook.com/VIDC.org/videos/1087499714793986/.

[21] UN Comtrade, African export and import shares with main partners 2020.

[22] *Eurostat*, April 2021, Africa-EU – international trade in goods statistics, Comext DS-018995

[23] Ibid.

[24] October 20, 2020, *VIDC* webinar: "Europe and China: A new Race for Africa during a pandemic."

[25] Hainzl, 230.

On a final note, let me add a strongly nuanced comment of the economist and China expert, Solange Chatelard, with regard to the debate of China's economic footprint in Africa. Chatelard describes the main discourse pattern as "stuck in between two polarizing narratives: paranoia and propaganda, framing the current China-Africa debate."[26] Indeed, growing polarization of contrasting narratives does not only apply to African regions, but also to West and Central Asia.

Options for cooperation

Europe's pragmatic willingness to cooperate with the PR of China is particularly connected to non-traditional security threats. Yet, the existential issue of climate change has emerged as one of the top security challenges in the diplomatic communication between Brussels and Beijing. Both sides acknowledge that only collective global action serves as the key to address natural disasters caused by climate change, like large-scale forest fires, flooding, draught or the rise of sea levels. Countermeasures against climate change require big data analysis; and big data are, among other things, generated by Earth-observing satellite systems.

The existing cooperation and bilateral exchange of Earth observation data between the European Space Agency and China are dealt with in the chapter on Low Earth Orbit and Outer Space. The bilateral Dragon 5 Earth observation program has already entered its second year; the results of the first year were presented at an online symposium in July 2021.[27] Current bilateral projects of the Dragon 5 cooperation focus on climate change, sustainable agriculture and water resources, ecosystems, urbanisation and environment, oceans and coastal zones.[28] On the website of the European Space Agency (ESA), the Vice Minister of the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology praises the Dragon Programme as the flagship of Chinese-

[26] Panel discussion: China and the Future of Africa, June 26, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRwY5cgi-O8; Florence Chatelard, Free University of Brussels, produced two films thematising Chinese presence in Africa: "When China Met Africa" (BBC, 2011), and "King Cobra and the Dragon" (Al Jazeera, 2012).

[27] July 19-26, 2021, for details see conference program, https://dragon-symp2021.esa.int/.

[28] http://dragon5.esa.int/.

European cooperation in Earth observation.[29] Even more interesting is the fact that in an ESA strategy document from March 2021 there is not a single mention of current and future cooperation with the People's Republic of China. Quite on the contrary, reference is only made to other global space actors:

> ESA will pursue and will strengthen its cooperation with key international partners like the US, Japan, and Russia and will also promote the value of space and its applications in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America.[30]

Whether there are options for further expanding the scientific cooperation basis of the Dragon 5 Programme, according to the EU China strategy, or whether the existing bilateral cooperation is called into question will be decided at a European Space Summit, scheduled for 2022.

A definitely undisputed and vast field of cooperation between the EU and the PR of China is about green economics. Brussels repeatedly reaffirms the political will to join efforts with Beijing in promoting a green economic recovery in the post-pandemic era. Europe's commitment to speed up the implementation of the Paris agreement 2015 also implies working together with other major powers to establish cooperation in areas such as renewable energy production and energy efficiency, low-carbon cities, clean energy, carbon markets and hydrofluorocarbons. Nearly one third of the European post-Covid-19 economic recovery funds is earmarked for sustainable investment and energy transition. In this vein, holding a *China-EU Green Economic Cooperation and Development Summit* on July 8, 2021[31] was certainly in line with Brussels' strategic intent. At the same time, it is noteworthy that no leading EU official in office was among the keynote speakers of the respective online summit. Herman Van Rompuy, president emeritus of the

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[29] Ibid., statement from Dr. Huang Wei, Vice Minister MOST-China: "The Dragon Programme, a flagship of the China-Europe Science & Technology cooperation in Earth observation, has achieved impressive results by bringing together top scientists, training young talents, and sharing satellite data from both sides."

[30] Josef Aschbacher, March 31, 2021, *ESA Agenda 2025 – Make space for Europe*, 14, https://esamultimedia.esa.int/docs/ESA_Agenda_2025_final.pdf.

[31] China-EU Green Economic Cooperation and Development Summit, organized online by Luxembourg Stock Exchange, Bank of China, China Chamber of Commerce to the EU, https://www.bourse.lu/news-china-eu-green-summit.

European Council, presented the position of the European Union. This reticence regarding the presence of top EU decision-makers is a clear indication of Brussels' diplomatic caution with regard to the cooperation with Beijing.

Combined EU-China efforts to reach faster climate neutrality – the EU commitment until 2050, the PR of China's commitment until 2060 – eventually affect all countries in the broader Eurostrategic orbit and will be closely monitored by their governments. On the other hand, an EU-Chinese "green" cooperation will exercise more effective monitoring vis-à-vis governments in Africa, West Asia, and Central Asia in order to reduce their national emission levels. At the above mentioned Green Economic Cooperation Summit, Chargé d'Affaires Wang Hongjian emphasises that it is the responsibility of both major powers to set an example for developing countries; the European Union and China "should show their respective responsibilities to strengthen in-depth cooperation and create more ideas and projects, thus giving more experience for countries at different stages of development to learn from and bringing more confidence to the global response to green development."[32] In the context of Green Development cooperation, however, it must be borne in mind that economic competition also plays a role here. It cannot be ignored that European companies have to compete with Chinese enterprises in emerging economies like e.g. the Gulf States as regards highly innovative products in the field of energy transition and environmental protection.

Another frequently invoked area of cooperation between Europe and China across the globe is the health sector. In Part I of this volume, Barbara Farkas elaborates in full detail on the narrative and implications of China's "Health Silk Road". Since the respective policy concept entails visible effects in the broader Eurostrategic orbit, two points will be shortly addressed as follows: Despite the vaccine distribution initiative COVAX under the aegis of the WHO, the regularly expressed affirmations of an EU-China coordination in global health governance appear to have limits as to their implementation. The non-approval of Chinese vaccines in the EU may serve as a prime example, at the date early August 2021. Despite the fact that the World

[32] Ibid., joint press release, July 8, 2021, see also https://delano.lu/article/financial-outfits-aim-to-boost?index=0.

Health Organization has validated the Chinese vaccine Sinovac on June 1, 2021, for WHO emergency use listing, the overwhelming majority of EU member countries recognise vaccination only in case of vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). So far Chinese vaccines are not included in the EMA Covid-19 vaccine approval list. At this stage, only six EU members - including Austria - recognise the Sinovac vaccine for international travellers.[33] Another factor constituting a perceivable obstacle to European-Chinese collaboration regarding global health is Beijing's reluctance to share data regarded as sensitive.[34] In this context, the paranoia about the PRC's growing footprint as mentioned above for the West can be applied to China. Beijing all too often refuses the disclosure of relevant data on the grounds of fear of politicisation.

Before concluding the reflection on options for cooperation between Europe and China, the ideas of a prominent academic voice without allegiance to either side should be briefly addressed. Kishore Mahbubani, a Singapore based ex-diplomat, sees the migration issue as the main security risk for Europe and recommends close cooperation with China in the field of development policy in Africa:

> If Europe wants to preserve its own long-term interests, it should make the development of Africa, in partnership with China, an immediate priority. […] A massive turnout of European leaders at such a summit (China-Africa summit in Beijing, author's note) would send a powerful market signal. It could catalyse a powerful wave of new investment in Africa. Over time, with a strong African economy, there will be less incentive for widespread African migration to Europe.[35]

Mahbubani's analysis should not be dismissed, despite showing a strong focus on geopolitical great power rivalry rather than on emerging existential global threats such as climate change, pandemics, and pollution.

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[33] Per July 4, 2021, the following EU member countries accept Sinovac as valid proof of immunity: Austria, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Netherlands, Spain, https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/travel-only-6-eu-schengen-countries-recognise-chinas-sinovac-vaccine-as-valid-proof-of-immunity/.

[34] See EURICS Brief 2021/9, 3, http://eurics.eu/upload/document/20210226100241_eurics-february2021.pdf.

[35] Kishore Mahbubani (2020), *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*, 222.

In summary, a "new restraint" on the part of the European Union in terms of cooperation with the PR China at the global level is discernible in several respects. This reluctance ultimately causes a number of options for cooperation not fully exploited. The EU's positioning vis-a-vis China is all too readily related to transatlantic relations. Yet, considering Brussel's relationship with Washington the main driver for EU-China "disturbances" reflects a rather one-dimensional view. A multi-layered approach taking into account all aspects of the European China strategy in its present form should be applied. In a sense, the frequently discussed issue of a European strategic autonomy starts at the question of an appropriate analytical approach.

Another analytical tool too often neglected in current analysis of China is the fourth dimension: the timeline. Many analyses focus too much on the last decade. While the Belt & Road Initiative is undoubtedly a foreign policy instrument of the Xi Jinping era, most policies of the People's Republic, especially in the Eurostrategic broader orbit, follow a longer-term Grand Strategy and in some cases go back far beyond the era of Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao.[36]

[36] For the Grand Strategy analysis of the Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin eras see Feichtinger, Buchas and Vogl (eds.), *China's Grand Strategy im Wandel* (2019).

Summary

Final Summary and Outlook

Johann Frank, Doris Vogl

This publication takes as its main task three basic objectives: First, to expand the radius of observation in security policy analysis in general by including strategic spaces, usually less considered in traditional security policy research. Second, to broaden the horizon of knowledge about China's current foreign policy drivers affecting the European Union. Against this backdrop, the individual contributions strive for a broader picture while taking stock of China's growing footprint in various strategic spaces. The third objective proves to be most complex: to examine Brussels' strategic approach towards Beijing in different strategic spaces and to highlight those trends that might shape the future EU-China relationship. To this end, it was also necessary to point at neglected issues or to address discursive flaws.

Summing up, what conclusions can be drawn from the co-authors' contributions of this volume? The editors want to emphasize the following points:

- The understanding of China's strategic narratives without eclipsing the corresponding counter narratives enables a more profound debate on China in an increasingly polarized geopolitical landscape. The current shrinking space for political debate does not bode well for EU-China relations as well as for global stability.

- Chinese geopolitical narratives are based on the definition of the People's Republic as a developing country. Respective narratives require profound adaptation once China has lost the developing country status and self-imposed role as representative of the Global South. According to the EU-China strategy update 2019, China can no longer be regarded as a developing country.

- Beijing's official policy line to support EU enlargement efforts follows a mercantilist logic that seeks improved access to EU markets. Further, enlargement and integration are advocated by China under the aspect of an envisioned multipolar world order to raise the Union's geopolitical importance as a counterweight to the United States.

- Beijing is first and foremost competing with Brussels in the economy and technology sphere. Geoeconomics appears as the current decisive strategic vector in the EU-China relationship.

- In respect to normative rivalry, China has gained influence in the broader orbit of eurostrategic regions. The political elites of developing countries are impressed by China's successful large-scale poverty alleviation program at national level. This leads to a trend where poverty alleviation is given preference over civil and political rights in developing countries.

- Cyberspace, Low Earth Orbit and Outer Space show the highest dynamic level in terms of competing for innovative markets but also in regard to risk scenarios. In these non-traditional security spaces, we see a strong intertwining of civilian and military domains. The room for hybrid activities is enlarged dramatically by the new strategic spaces. Against this backdrop, the EU has to adapt its security strategy.

- The EU has been demonstrating considerable flexibility and ingenuity in terms of realpolitik response to China's rise as a competing or rival power outside the confining frame of threat perception. However, the strategic course-setting is lagging behind. As a first priority, the Union must define its interests in order to deal with China's new assertiveness in global agendas to the fullest extent possible.

To approach the future of EU-China relations, three scenarios suggest themselves:

1) **Disintegration of EU-China relations**

The EU is taking a confident and hard line on China as a sole actor to the point of an eroding bilateral relationship. Brussels is pursuing its own geopolitical path. This scenario presupposes for Europe a position of strength as a largely autonomous power in a multi-polar geopolitical setting. Since Beijing views the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation primarily as a tool for US global "hegemonism" including the presumption of a hegemonistic attitude towards Europe, the EU would have to present its strength outside NATO structures – such as in the form of mobile EU special forces or a European space force. The friction points that lead to the disintegration of EU-China relations can therefore be manifold and need not be related directly to China-U.S. rivalry. In case the attitude of Brussels should be aligned closely with the NATO headquarter in regard to the legitimacy of interference in the Asian Pacific, Beijing is likely to renounce the EU-China Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (2016) and proceed with the closure of markets as in the case of Australia. The result would be a profound disintegration of EU-China relations.

For the time being, the signs do not point to the eruption of an armed conflict in the Asian Pacific or along the Himalaya range. On the other hand, time is working against the current supremacy of the United States in several technological fields, both civilian and military. This circumstance could accelerate completely new variants of hybrid warfare, for example in the international monetary and financial system. In this light, recent US government restrictions against large Chinese companies that were going to list on the New York Stock Exchange appear even more profound in a national security context.

2) Continuation of troubled EU-China relations

It is fair to note that the European Union has been far more confrontational towards China during recent months EU-China relations with minor confrontation than in previous years. The ratification of the bilateral comprehensive investment agreement was put on hold by the European Parliament in May 2021 and official statements on China have substantially hardened. However, one thing should be taken into account: Beijing's perception of confrontation with Brussels is a differentiated one. For Beijing, it makes a significant difference, based on a whole set of security policy parameters, whether Europe joins US initiatives or takes an independent path of confrontation. In the latter case, the doors are more likely to stay open for compromise and negotiations; in the former case, the negative perception dominates to such an extent that dialogue would most likely be frozen from the onset.

Since the G7 and NATO summits of June 2021, a transatlantic convergence in regard to China policies has shown first contours. However, it would be premature to speak of a full "body shape."[1] Opinions are divided on the question of how to proceed with confronting Beijing. On the one hand, we see the widespread point of view that there is little room for Brussels to act alone. It is therefore concluded that Brussels' stance towards China should be contingent on developments in the US-China relationship. On the other hand, the opposite view that the accelerated competition between the great powers is not limiting but enlarging the action space of the EU, is gaining popularity. The editors of this book argue that, even while maintaining a confrontational course, the European Union should always keep open the option for issue-based dialogue with China, taking transatlantic commitments into full account.

[1] For an analysis in this context see: Wolfgang Ischinger, Joseph Nye et. al., *Mind the Gap: Priorities for Transatlantic China Policy*, Report of the Distinguished Reflection Group on Transatlantic China Policy, July 2021, https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/2021/Report_of_the_China_Reflection_Group/MindTheGap_PrioritiesForATransatlanticChinaPolicy.pdf.

3) **Declining confrontation in EU-China relations**

In this outlook scenario, the European Union would renounce major confrontation (e.g. sanctions policy, non-ratification of bilateral agreements) with China in line with the current value-based strategic approach. Such kind of radical policy change appears realistic only under the condition of a significant weakening of the Union, whether due to disintegration or Black Swan events, such as natural disasters or a near-collapse of the European financial system. In any case, Europe would give up its claim to major power politics vis-a-vis Beijing and would retreat to acting like a middle power. This scenario assumes an internal weakening of the EU, while Beijing continues to act from a position of strength. EU-China relations would be increasingly asymmetric.

The three scenarios as specified above are derived from the assumption of relatively constant realpolitik reaction patterns in the geopolitical field of action. Additionally, a look into the future benefits from including extraordinary development options that should not be instantly discarded as dystopian. A deeply alarmed world in which the European Union together with a deeply alarmed China and other nations are struggling – irrespective of normative rivalry and economic competition – to ensure the survival of their populations in the fight against threatening climate change.

Quite deliberately, no probability forecast was made for the different future scenarios of this outlook. Yet, it is everyone's hope that the emergence of the catastrophic scenario will never manifest itself in reality. In this context and on a final note, it should be emphasized that close global cooperation in regard to climate change is desperately needed. Such an endeavour must extend beyond the European Union and China.

Annex

The Military Potential of the People's Liberation Army in the Strategic Regions and Spaces of the European Union

Matthias Postl

xtock/Shutterstock.com

This annex uses open sources on military capabilities and public strategic documents to examine the potential of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in strategic regions and spaces of the European Union by using the indicators "force employment" and "capabilities." The "force employment" indicator describes how forces are deployed and refers to China's defence strategy goals. The PLA resources available to operate in the defined strategic regions and spaces determine the "capabilities" indicator.[1]

[1] Olivier Minkwitz, "Demokratien und militärische Effektivität. Warum sich Demokratien tendenziell besser schlagen," Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen 12, Nr. 2 (2005), 307, https://doi.org/10.5771/0946-7165-2005-2-301.

Regions

EU, West Balkans and Eastern Europe

Force employment

China's strategic goal is a mostly autonomous Europe in terms of security and defence policy, which requires the weakening of transatlantic hard power alliances. If the strategy of containing US influence in Europe fails, the alternative will be to enforce bilateral relations with selected EU member states to the extent that EU resolutions and policies directed against China are difficult to achieve in unanimous votes. In this sense, apart from economic engagement, China does not seek military influence but is ready to create disunity.[2]

Capabilities

The PLA presence within the EU is limited to defence attachés in embassies and structures that carry out PR activities, maintaining contact with political actors and keeping track of security incidents and new developments.

On Chinese territory, the PLA disposes of long-range capabilities reaching out to Europe, for example DF-26 ballistic missiles, H-6 bombers serving as delivery platforms for shorter-range missiles, long-range missiles with nuclear warheads, cyber and space forces.[3] Furthermore, the EU foreign investment screening mechanism 2020 assumes that Chinese investors are instrumentalised by governmental institutions for civil-military intelligence activities.[4]

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[2] China's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe: From "Old Comrades" to New Partners (Routledge, 2017), 212-213.

[3] "DOD Releases 2020 Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 2020, https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2332126/dod-releases-2020-report-on-military-and-security-developments-involving-the-pe.

[4] "EU foreign investment screening mechanism becomes fully operational," European Commission, October 9, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1867.

Russia

Force employment

Although Russia and China do not form a bilateral security alliance, their military structures show an increasingly high level of cooperation, accompanied by regular joint military manoeuvres since 2005. The "Sibu/Interaction 2021" joint exercise of August 2021 was the first where a significant number of foreign troops was allowed entry onto Chinese territory. In addition, Russian soldiers operated Chinese weapons for the first time. This can be seen as a further step towards closer mutual security cooperation between Russia and China.[5]

Capabilities

The goal of the joint 2021 exercises was to deepen joint counterterrorism operations between Chinese and Russian forces and demonstrate joint protection of international and regional security and stability. The purpose of the 2020 joint exercise was to exercise joint capability to repel the attack of a notional state adversary and conduct offensive operations, to manage a conflict escalating from a local war to a regional war and improve the multinational operations capability.[6]

The 2019 joint exercise included countering enemy air attacks and conducting combined conventional offensive air and ground operations, thus exhibiting an interstate warfare component.[7]

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5 "Russland und China: Gemeinsames Manöver," euronews, August 13, 2021, https://de.euronews.com/2021/08/13/russland-und-china-gemeinsames-manover.

6 Ingrid Steiner-Gashi, "Russisch-chinesische Manöver schüren Sorgen in den USA," kurier.at, August 10, 2021, https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/russisch-chinesische-manoever-schuert-sorgen-in-den-usa/401468788.

7 "China Sends Strategic Bombers, Tanks and 1,600 Troops to Russia for Large Military Drill," The Diplomat, September 17, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/china-sends-strategic-bombers-tanks-and-1600-troops-to-russia-for-large-military-drill.

Gulf of Aden, Atlantic, Mediterranean Sea

Base Djibouti

Force employment

The Chinese Djibouti Logistics Support Base was put into operation in August 2017 and has become a hub for securing the maritime Silk Road and trade exchanges with Africa. Further, it is supposed to protect over one million Chinese nationals working and living in Africa.[8]

The Djibouti logistics base supports China to implement military co-operation, hold joint exercises and drills, conduct evacuation and rescue operations for Chinese civilians, and protect strategic sea routes. Anti-terrorism and intelligence gathering are also among the base's missions.

The Djibouti base is currently supposed to focus primarily on "Military Operations other than War" (MOOTW) and continue to supply logistics assistance to PLA Navy (PLAN) ships.

It is a "transit point" for UN peacekeeping Chinese troops in Africa and the Middle East. Another task is to conduct anti-piracy missions, for example the mission in the Gulf of Aden. The base is also supposed to serve as a logistic hub in humanitarian relief missions. For example, the PLA Navy, in cooperation with the EU, has conducted escort missions for World Food Program supplies to Somalia on a yearly basis. The location can also be used for cyber and electronic warfare, with the potential advantage of having close access to undersea Internet cables linking Europe to Asia.[9]

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[8] Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Military Base in Djibouti: A Microcosm of China's Growing Competition with the United States and New Bipolarity," Journal of Contemporary China 29, Nr. 125 (December 2019), 739, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1704994.

[9] The PLA beyond borders – Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context (Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 2021), 93-95, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/beyond-borders/990-059-NDU-PLA_Beyond_Borders_sp_jm14.pdf.

Capabilities

The facility can accommodate 10,000 people, but Chinese authorities indicate that they would not station more than 2,000 officers and soldiers there.[10] The deployed troops consist of several units, including 3-4 squadrons of integrated security support, two security reconnaissance squadrons, a frigate protection squadron, a helicopter squadron, an intelligence-electronic communications squadron, a health and medical squadron, and a logistics squadron. The deployment also includes a special forces squadron equipped with heavy Z-8F helicopters capable of conducting missions within several hundred kilometres, light armoured vehicles, and modern anti-tank missiles. Since 2008, the PLA Navy has continuously deployed four or five military ships at the base. If needed, the PLA vessels' air defence systems can provide air security as well. The base can host larger PLA naval vessels like the aircraft carrier Liaoning due to a deep-water quay. The helideck is wide enough to land containers launched by transport planes and long enough to land drones, which can be operated from the base. The logistics support base is also designed to resist air attacks. Its weakness is the lack of an airport.[11]

Strategic Maritime Strongpoints

Force employment

Due to the lack of overseas military bases, strategic civilian ports are supposed to support the PLAN in supplying ships. For direct and open military supply China will use civilian ports only in case of a major conflict. Otherwise, regular supply through civilian ports will suffice for existing missions. According to US security analyses, this dual-use strategic base model is gaining ground, since it offers significant peacetime logistical capabilities as well as intelligence and communications benefits.[12]

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10 Cabestan, "China's Military Base in Djibouti," 737.
11 Ibid., 739.
12 The PLA beyond borders, 94

Capabilities

95 ports outside China are operated and partially owned by four big Chinese companies, Cosco, Hutchison, China Merchants Port, China Merchant Port (Terminal Link), and a large number of small companies. These four big companies are world leaders in shipping and transportation and complement the PLA's otherwise quite limited overseas logistics capabilities with access to select foreign ports to provide the necessary logistical support for naval operations in such distant waters.[13]

By ocean, there are 31 ports in the Atlantic, 25 in the Indian Ocean, 21 in the Pacific, and 16 in the Mediterranean. 22 ports are located in Europe, 20 in the Middle East and 20 in Africa. Most are located near important sea routes such as the English Channel, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Gibraltar and the Turkish Strait.[14]

Not all ports are actually used or considered for use by the Chinese military. Of importance is the extent to which the respective Chinese company controls the operation of the port, the capacity of the port to serve naval vessels, and the specific terms of the concession by the local port authority. On the other hand, a terminal operator has wide discretion in granting access to naval vessels wishing to call, store, and bunker as well as use the dry dock, medical facilities, power supply, and other terminal facilities.[15] There are two Chinese companies likely to make their ports accessible to the PLA: COSCO (China Ocean Shipping Company) operates eight Terminals in Europe and is a key state-owned enterprise that was formerly the only domestic and international shipping operator in China directly controlled by the Chinese Ministry of Transport. Its subsidiary COSCO Shipping Ports, which operates terminals, has taken a number of notable positions in foreign ports, including majority control of the port authority in Piraeus, Greece, with a 100 percent

13 "DOD Releases 2020 Report", 128.

14 Isaac Kardon, "Research & Debate – Pier Competitor: Testimony on China's Global Ports," Naval War College Review, Volume 74, Number 1, Winter 2021, 3, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol74/iss1/11.

15 Ibid., 4.

stake and the Khalifa port in Abu Dhabi, UAE, to set up the largest freight station in the Middle East.[16]

The company China Merchants Port (CM Port) operates the port adjacent to the logistics support base in Djibouti, where it provides regular commercial berthing for PLA Navy structures.

COSCO and CM Port have participated in military-civilian exercises with their container ships and RO/RO (Roll on, Roll off) vessels, including transporting live ammunition and using RO/RO vessels built to military specifications, so cooperation in other areas is expected.[17]

Summing up, China is able to carry out its supply for smaller overseas operations through the use of civil military dual use companies and ports. However, these capacities are insufficient in case of a major military conflict.

Arctic Regions

Force employment

China's interest in increasing its cooperation with nations along the so-called "Polar Silk Road" is reflected in China's first Arctic strategy, published in January 2018. To this end, it also declared itself a "near-Arctic state." The intention is "free access" to the arctic maritime routes to thus expand economic interests in the region. China's growing involvement in extracting natural resources in the Arctic has created new opportunities for cooperation but also a conflict of interests between China and Russia. Russian regulations for passage through the Northern Sea Route hinder the PLA Navy to operate in the Arctic. China's de facto acceptance of Russia's claims to control of the NSR route and compliance with Russian regulations is a concession by China to Russia to allow cooperation in reducing the influence of the USA and Canada in the Arctic region. This approach also affects the security interests of the EU Arctic states.[18]

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16 Ibid., 5.

17 Ibid., 7.

18 "China-Russian cooperation in the Arctic: A cause for concern for the Western Arctic States?", Taylor & Francis, July 5, 2021, 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2021.1936098.

Capabilities

China officially has no military capabilities in the Arctic. China's presence is limited to two research stations in Iceland and Norway and two icebreakers. Xuelong 1 already crossed the Northwest Passage in 2017 and breaks ice 1.2 meters thick. Xuelong 2 can break ice 1.5 meters thick and is the first polar research vessel that can break ice while moving forward or backward.

Peacekeeping forces

International UN missions in Africa

Force employment

The active promotion of UN-missions' activities is an effective tool by which China seeks to change the global perception of its international role. For this reason, China is participating in international UN-missions with considerable peacekeeping and training staff contingents. China has deployed an average of 2,500 troops continuously on UN missions in recent years. In terms of the strategic rationale and fitting with China's adherence to its basic understanding of the world order in which interventions should only be authorized by the UN, it is argued that China is also using its role in the UN to deploy troops in areas where it has economic interests.

Capabilities

As of May 31, 2021, China had 2,471 uniformed personnel under United Nations command missions. Among them are 2,382 soldiers. Against this background, China is the 9th largest sending state world-wide for UN missions. Deployed are infantry, engineer, helicopter and medical units. In addition, China has sent 73 military observers and staff officers to mission headquarters and 16 police officers.[19]

[19] "Troop and police contributors," United Nations Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors.

Main UNPKOs the PLA participates

(Up to May 31, 2021: Troop and police contributors, United Nations Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors.)

Mali (MINUSMA)	Force protection unit of 170 troops, engineering unit of 155 troops, and medical unit of 70 troops. **Total 395** as of May 31, 2021	In Mali, the engineering unit built and repaired 2,900 m of roads, levelled 400,000 m^2 of ground, and installed 667 prefabricated houses; the force protection unit conducted 2,710 armed patrols and security tasks; and the medical unit treated 8,120 patients.
South Sudan (UNMISS)	Infantry battalion of 700 troops. The unit, consisting of three infantry companies and a logistics support company, an engineering unit of 268 troops, and a medical unit of 63 troops. **Total 1031** as of May 31, 2021	In South Sudan, the engineering unit built and maintained 5,365 km of roads, repaired 7 bridges, and installed 72 prefabricated houses; the medical unit treated 21,000 patients; the infantry battalion conducted 63 long/short-distance patrols, and carried out 216 armed escorts and 42 inspections in refugee camps, covering a total mileage of 1,020,000 km.
Sudan (UNAMID)	Engineering unit of 225 troops, helicopter unit of 140 troops Closed December 31, 2020, is in the process of troop withdrawal. **Total 224** as of May 31, 2021	In Darfur, Sudan, the engineering unit built and repaired 89 km of roads, installed 400 prefabricated houses and drilled 14 wells; the helicopter unit flew 800 sorties totalling 1,150 hours, transporting 5,500 persons and 230 tons of materials. Helicopter Unit Capability 4 Mi-171 medium multipurpose helicopters, an aviation company, a maintenance company, and a logistics support company. Tasks such as air patrol, battlefield reconnaissance, and transportation of personnel and supplies.

Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Multi-functional engineering unit of 180 troops, construction engineering unit of 200 troops, and medical unit of 30 troops. **Total 410** as of May 31, 2021	In Lebanon, the engineering unit cleared 10,342 mines and items of unexploded ordnance; completed maintenance tasks on houses and equipment; received and treated 78,900 patients.
DR Congo (MONUSCO)	Engineering unit of 175 troops and medical unit of 43 troops. **Total 218** as of May 31, 2021	In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the engineering unit built 4,650 km of roads and 214 bridges; and the medical unit treated 35,000 patients.

UN Peacekeeping standby forces

Force employment

In 2015, there was an increase to an 8,000-strong rapid reaction force for UN missions, so China should soon be able to conduct interventions with brigade-sized forces. So far, China has the capacity to conduct international interventions with battalion-sized forces. There is a further increase in military operations other than war (MOOTW), such as counterterrorism, humanitarian aid/disaster relief and evacuations of civilians.

Capabilities

The PLA's contributions to the rapid response force include 19 units in six categories: infantry, engineers, transportation, guards, rapid response, and helicopters. 28 company- and battalion-sized contingents from various services of the PLA may be assigned to the force.

It is presumed that the six infantry battalions consist of about an 850-man unit divided into three infantry companies that can "independently conduct combat operations" and a combat support company providing fire support, intelligence reconnaissance and equipment maintenance.

These units are on standby for overseas UN operations at any time.

This level of standby readiness demonstrates that the PLA is capable of handling and executing joint operational tasks within the PLA branches. These are long-distance transport, maintaining morale in deployed forces, repairing and maintaining equipment, supplying food and fuel, treating and evacuating the wounded or sick, pre-deployment training, selecting officers and soldiers, rotating and maintaining battalion-sized units over an extended time period. The PLA expeditionary planning capabilities are distributed among all mainland regional military theater commands[20] except the Eastern Theater Command to ensure the capability of planning and executing UN missions and operations. It can therefore be assumed that each of the four other PLA theater commands is capable of providing a battalion - and in the future a brigade - for international operations.

Expeditionary forces for overseas UN missions, however, will continue to play a minor role in the future compared to the PLA as a whole, as most Army personnel continue to focus on domestic threats. In summary, in the near future Chinas capacity for more intense combat military operations in regions of Africa will increase, but not to fight large-scale wars.

International Disaster relief

Force employment

Participation in HA/DR (High Availability, Disaster Recovery) missions offers China the advantage of demonstrating its responsibility as a global power and making good public relations out of them without large financial outlays.[21] Beijing views the PLA's international engagement in HA/DR exercises, conferences and competitions as extremely useful for improving diplomatic relations and enhancing China's soft power. Like other countries, the extent to which relief is provided is also driven by interests and depends on economic and political relations.[22]

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[20] The PLA has five Theater Commands: the Eastern Theater Command, the Southern Theater Command, the Western Theater Command, the Northern Theater Command and the Central Theater Command.

[21] Gregory Coutaz, Image-building as Impetus for the Growth of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Engagement in International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Operations, 18. Aufl. (Leiden Koninklijke Brill NV European Journal of East Asian Studies, 2019), 60, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700615-01801006.

[22] Ibid., 57-58.

Capabilities

The capacities for international disaster relief operations of the PLA are versatile. They may include air or maritime transport units, engineers, medical personnel. There is a dedicated search and rescue unit called CISAR (China International Search and Rescue) which was deployed, for example, during the earthquake in Japan. Furthermore, the PLA has two hospital ships that can be sent to disaster areas and recently a hospital aircraft in which 30 patients can be treated. An example of capacities for HA/DR operations can be shown in the involvement of the PLA on the Earthquake in Nepal 2015. China deployed three helicopters, eight transport aircraft; more than 500 PLA personnel, delivered at least 449 tons of relief supplies, did transport tasks of relief personnel and equipment. In addition, China undertook search and rescue missions, transport of injured or trapped persons, and medical assistance.[23]

Non-traditional security spaces

Cyberspace

Force employment

For China, cyberspace is one of the key areas specified in the national security strategy. In the National Defence Strategy of July 24, 2019, cyberattacks are defined as a major threat. Consequently, China has been expanding its cyberwarfare capabilities in both offense and defence. As stated in the Defence Strategy, the PLA is thus resolutely committed to national cyber sovereignty and information security.[24]

The latest revision of China's "military strategic guideline" aims at winning informatized local wars. In peacetime, China's cyber forces are continuously

[23] "Meet Chinese military's first 'flying hospital'," China Military Online, July 12, 2021, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-07/12/content_10060454.htm.

[24] China's National Defense in the New Era, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, First Edition, July 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

building up superiority over potential opponents with the aim to seize the initiative by designing the cyberspace conditions of possible future conflicts.[25]

The threshold for China to activate its cyber forces globally and also in the EU is relatively low, since cyberattacks can be attributed to non-governmental criminal hacker groups. The strategy of deploying cyber forces in dual use on the principle of civil-military fusion makes it difficult to identify the source of attack.[26]

Capabilities

The electronic warfare units are the Cyber Operation and Electronic Warfare Force, which reports to the PLA Strategic Support Force's (SSF) Network Systems Division. Current electronic warfare units appear to include three types of brigades: the Electronic Countermeasures Brigade, the Electronic Satellite Countermeasures Brigade, and the Technical Intelligence Brigade for mission command support. Electronic warfare capabilities are supported by ground-based electronic equipment, (un)manned electronic warfare aircraft, and satellites for signal collection. Although the current PLA capabilities of electronic warfare drones and satellites are not fully known, combat readiness can be expected.[27] The new "Cyber Force" enables the PLA to enter information operations in peacetime and wartime to prepare the battlefield in conjunction with cyber intelligence and reconnaissance.[28]

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[25] Elsa B. Kania, "Artificial intelligence in China's revolution in military affairs," Journal of Strategic Studies (May 2021), 521, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2021.1894136.

[26] Simone Dossi, "On the asymmetric advantages of cyberwarfare. Western literature and the Chinese journal Guofang Keji," Journal of Strategic Studies (March 2019), 294, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1581613.

[27] Tae Park, Changhyung Lee and Soyeon Kim, "Analysis of Electronic Warfare Capability of the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLASSF): Its Impacts and Implications on Korean Security," Korean Journal of Defense Analysis Vol. 33, Nr. 1 (March 2021), 136, https://doi.org/10.22883/kjda.2021.33.1.006.

[28] Elsa B. Kania and John Costello, "Seizing the commanding heights: the PLA Strategic Support Force in Chinese military power," Journal of Strategic Studies (May 2020), 244, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1747444.

Cyberspace Information Operations

The PLA is capable of conducting APT (Advanced Persistent Threat) attacks to gather information. APT operations are often enabled by "spear phishing." This kind of operations is not only aimed at tapping information of value, but also at penetrating networks responsible for critical infrastructures. In the event of an armed conflict China could introduce viruses into foreign critical infrastructure to disable social or military capabilities. According to US defence analysts, the detection of user habits to paralyse, damage, or stealth against antivirus software has therefore been in the focus of China's recent digital defence development.[29]

In the frame of its defence strategy, China has identified dependence on foreign technology as a major source of vulnerability. Therefore, China is expanding and developing its own technological knowledge in the digital domain with remarkable speed and financial sources. The development of the 5G structure at a global scale exemplifies China's strategic intention to counterbalance the USA, which has dominated digital infrastructure worldwide so far.[30]

Electronic warfare capability

China has the same electronic warfare capabilities comparable to the USA and Russia. The units can operate unmanned electronic warfare aircraft and submarines with radar jamming, communications disruption, and more active electronic warfare capabilities will be deployed. They can draw on a wide range of equipment, such as detectors for every spectrum of radio waves to electronic jamming devices for various war situations, which can also be connected in a network. They are therefore capable of networked electronic warfare on land, sea and air.[31] Electronic warfare units operate ground-based equipment, drones, and satellites for electronic warfare.[32] China also disposes of several passive radar systems, synthetic aperture radar satellites, and signals intelligence satellites.

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29 The PLA beyond borders, 302.
30 Dossi, "On the asymmetric advantages of cyberwarfare," 300-301.
31 Park, Lee and Kim, "Analysis of Electronic Warfare Capability of the PLASSF," 134.
32 Ibid., 119.

China's unmanned electronic warfare drones

China not only manufactures 70 percent of the world's drones but has also experienced tremendous growth in the unmanned aircraft sector. The PLA has already developed the ChiHong-5/7 drone and stealth UAVs that can be used for electronic warfare, presumably by replicating American UAVs. Many civilian UAVs can be equipped with electronic warfare devices, transforming them into unmanned aerial vehicles for electronic warfare.[33] There is also a development of drone submarines which are used for covert, long range reconnaissance and attack missions against strategic targets.[34]

Satellites for electronic warfare

The PLA operates a large number of satellites with global outreach and has deployed optical, communications and SAR (synthetic aperture radar for observations at night or during inclement weather) satellites in low Earth and geostationary orbit for surveillance and reconnaissance. The signals intelligence satellites also enable China to conduct electronic warfare via satellites worldwide.[35]

The PLA's signals intelligence satellites mainly consist of the Yaogan series. In 2019, the PLA launched the 30th Yaogan-satellite, a low-earth orbit satellite known for collecting signals intelligence with a set of three satellites. China is expected to have the second-largest number of information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) satellites after the United States in the near future. It is difficult to estimate the capacity of the military satellites because the data have not been made publicly available.

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33 Ibid., 133.

34 Stephen Chen, "China military develops robotic submarines to launch a new era of sea power," South China Morning Post, July 22, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2156361/china-developing-unmanned-ai-submarines-launch-new-era-sea-power.

35 Park, Lee and Kim, "Analysis of Electronic Warfare Capability of the PLASSF," 130.

Outer Space

Force employment

Outer Space is a crucial area in China's strategic agenda.[36] The potential of China's Outer Space capabilities is to be evaluated in the same way as the cyber capabilities. The EU is not considered a military rival due to its low military space capabilities in contrast to the US Space Force. However, the EU also has capabilities and interests that may create conflicting issues in the Outer Space. In this context, EU countries with NATO membership are particularly affected. The active and prompt defence of space capacities is an inherent component of China's military strategy. Strategically, China takes a defensive position but is aiming at leading the initiative on the operational level in the Outer Space.

China's Outer Space operations capabilities

Space Deterrence

China has the capability for deterrence actions against all possible adversaries in open space, as has been demonstrated in military exercises and tests. Furthermore, the PLA is able to quickly deploy attack and counter-attack forces in open space that can respond to all enemy reactions. China's space defence is able to destroy infrastructure in open space by hard and soft kill methods and to intercept data streams and to block them. China is thereby able to stop the entire activity of opponents in space but also in orbit.

Space Blockade

China is capable of blockading space to prevent an adversary from entering space to gather or transmit information. In addition, launches can be blocked by delaying launch windows through cyber forces. Further, information blockades can be established by electronic warfare forces, which can take various forms. For example, an adversary's data links can be disrupted, or an orbiting satellite can be neutralized by hijacking its control systems or preventing ground control from issuing instructions. Alternatively, the data

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collected or transmitted by the satellite can be contaminated or disrupted. Another option is to "blind" a satellite by use of low-power energy weapons directed towards its sensors or other systems.[37]

Offensive Space Operations

The PLA is capable of conducting and planning "integrated operations" in space and can take the initiative in an offensive campaign in space.[38] China is also enhancing its capabilities to develop hit-to-kill operations in space that often overlap with the development of ballistic missiles and missile defence systems. The HQ/SC-19 and DN-3 anti-satellite missiles have demonstrated the ability to hit satellites and other spacecraft in Earth orbit up to the altitude of a few 100 km.[39]

The PLA developed co-orbital robotic satellites such as the Shiyan-7 (SY-7). These satellites keep their attack capabilities hidden until the moment of attack. Since 2008, China has deployed several "tracking satellites," of which ten or more are supposed to have been launched in the last decade.

Defensive Space Operations

China is capable of conducting defensive space operations. The defensive space operations capabilities include defence against ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and defence of space infrastructure. This involves a combination of active and passive measures, including stealth properties as well as diminishing radar, infrared, and electronic signatures of spacecraft to disguise their own capabilities and identity.[40] The PLA is capable of tracking objects in support of space defence or ballistic missile defence through four large phased array radars (LPARs). The radar bases are located in the cities of Hui'an, Korla, Longgangzhen, and Shuangyashan. China is continuously expanding its early warning capability using Great Wall satellites, which are comparable to US space-based infrared sensor satellites, ground-based X-band radars, and air assets.[41]

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37 The PLA beyond borders, 325-326.
38 Ibid., 327.
39 Kania and Costello, "Seizing the commanding heights," 249.
40 The PLA beyond borders, 327.
41 Kania and Costello, "Seizing the commanding heights," 249.

Space Information Support

Space-based systems enable the PLA to provide information support to focus on joint operations in distant territories. Key tasks of "information support from space" for ground, air, and naval forces of which China is capable include Reconnaissance and surveillance from space, missile early warning, communications and data transmission, tracking, navigation services, and Earth monitoring such as geodesy, hydrography, and meteorology. It can also provide "battlefield support," a terminology used by the PLA to characterize combat-relevant survey, mapping, meteorological, oceanographic, communications, and navigation information that expeditionary forces would support in a hostile overseas operating situation. China has upgraded its Bei Dou navigation satellite system from a regional capability to one with global reach, becoming only the third country to operate its own tracking and navigation system. Bei Dou's global navigation reach also has impacts on the PLA's precision strike abilities, as well as its communications function. For military communications purposes, China is building a limited but increasing number of satellites for data transfer and communications.[42] The Gaofen project has enabled new imaging capabilities, from high-resolution optical imagery to synthetic aperture radar satellites. The Gaofen-7 satellite is the latest model and can provide advanced imaging capabilities. Jilin-1 is an advanced high-resolution optical remote sensing satellite.

[42] Ibid., 243.

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Europe is increasingly confronted with China's footprint in different geostrategic spaces. This publication offers analysis on major competitive dynamics. Accordingly, the team of the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) examines soft power outreach, economic facts, socio-economic trends and monetary policy in tandem with military capacities.

Six authors provide analysis for their areas of expertise, covering a wide geographical range. In addition, four authors explore strategic narratives shaping China's current foreign policy, in order to make the political moves of a new global power easier to understand. What are the strategic convergence points for the EU in a competitive environment or rival setting with Beijing? The present volume highlights this crucial question, but also addresses options for cooperation.

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